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THE ROLE OF SUSPENSE IN DRAMATIC COMEDY

JEAN FURNISS GOODINE

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THE ROLE OF SUSPENSE IN DRAMATIC COMEDY

by

JEAN GOODINE

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ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF SUSPENSE IN DRAMATIC COMEDY

by

JEAN GOODINE

This study proposes that successful comic plots generate a special suspense. The comic playwright at the outset of the action provides the audience with information which both allows us to guess what the outcome will be, and stirs a desire for that resolution. A character confronts events with actions which may be misguided and cause his disappointment; the audience's involvement, our responses and anticipations are proven correct. Surprises may upset the audience's equilibrium from time to time, but in the end our expectations are fulfilled and, as if at our behest, the desired resolution is achieved. The purpose of this study will be to illustrate how suspense reinforces the comic theme of the power of man in selected dramas, some using a conventional plot which tells a story, and others employing a non-linear or "contextual" plot, in which exploration of a condition replaces progressive action.

Aristophanes's The Birds, discussed in chapter one, has a contextual plot which presents a situation and examines its consequences. The chain of cause and effect

does not unite the various episodes, and events may surprise both the audience and the protagonist. Peisthetærus is able to overcome all unexpected challenges and the audience is encouraged at the beginning to share his confidence, and thus to predict and enjoy his triumphs.

The second chapter explores Shakespeare's use of suspense in the linear plot. In Much Ado About Nothing, events are governed by planning and the audience can anticipate actions by being privy to the secret schemes. Our expectations are never disappointed and all intentions are declared and fulfilled. In All's Well That Ends Well, this comic suspense collapses. Expectations are frustrated because the audience is often ignorant of the protagonists' projects, and we become so disenchanted with the characters that the resolution does not delight. The Winter's Tale matches the greatest disappointment of the audience's expectations when Leontes rejects the oracle, with the most rewarding fulfillment of our hopes. In the final act, the audience is encouraged to look forward to the miraculous, but we hardly dare to anticipate the conclusion.

The next two chapters investigate plays by Jonson and Shaw, both of whom wrote linear and contextual plots. In Volpone and Bartholomew Fair, characters can control their victims' behavior by manipulating their expectations and exploiting their appetites. Full power belongs only to the audience, however, which can see all the characters' fixations and thus can anticipate events. Shaw's Arms

and the Man focuses attention more on the characters' personalities than their plans. Once the characters achieve the audience's insight, they realize that they can determine events, and the play reaches its happy ending. In Heartbreak House, the characters fail because they never try to control events. The audience can see the folly of their passivity and thus does not share in their defeat.

The characters in Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard are disappointed not because they are evil or stupid, but because they are ordinary people. Suspense, however, reasserts the power of man. The audience can predict that the estate will be sold; events are foreseeable and controllable. Waiting for Godot is a tragicomedy because it does not offer these assurances. Circumstances control personality. The audience's anticipations are often upset and we cannot always laugh at Vladimir and Estragon because their predicament appears unavoidable.

The gratification of true comedy thus depends upon suspense. Even if the comic protagonist does not thrive, the plot asserts the power of personality over events: despite surprising detours in the action, the audience's anticipations and desires are fulfilled.

CHAPTER I

THE NATURE OF COMIC SUSPENSE

Suspense is generally given little credit for the pleasure derived from comedy; it is more commonly associated with detective or adventure stories. In these forms of fiction the reader's attention is concentrated on what is going to happen next, and we are kept guessing about the outcome until the very end of the story. If we can predict events--deduce who is the culprit, or foresee how the hero will elude the latest danger--we consider the book a failure and stop reading.

Suspense also can be generated, however, when the resolution is never in doubt, but the author conceals when or how it will be achieved. Sufficient interest must then be quickened by the characters or by the story so that the audience either dreads or longs for that conclusion. Alfred Hitchcock, in a 1971 PBS interview, noted that the effect of his films is dependent upon the audience's foreknowledge. Suspense and alarm are heightened by camera technique which will protract the time between the disclosure to the audience of what will happen, and the actual event. Thus in "Frenzy" we must watch Babs ascend long flights of stairs with her supposed friend, who we know will strangle her. In tragedy too the outcome is usually foreseen and dreaded. We

witness Othello's increasing receptiveness to Iago's deceptions, and Desdemona's final exchange with Emilia has greater poignancy because the audience can anticipate what awaits her at Othello's hands. Comedy is unique in providing the audience with information which both allows us to guess the outcome, and stirs a desire for that resolution. Suspense here is controlled and reassuring--the audience is prompted to count on the happy ending being achieved but is left uncertain of how or when it will occur.

Although suspense is assumed to play a significant role in our appreciation of any literature, it has received remarkably little scholarly attention. Suspense is not listed in several literary glossaries, and where it is included the definition is frequently imprecise or unhelpful to a study of comedy. Thrall and Hibbard, for example, characterize suspense as "the anxiety of the audience concerning how or what is going to happen."¹ This definition is of limited value: it is apt for detective stories but would appear incompatible with the light-hearted spirit of comedies. In Bartholomew Fair, for example, there is suspense but no anxiety--for whom can we feel anxious? Most characters are either so dimwitted or obsessed with their own concerns that they are immune to pain, and the others like Grace and

¹A Handbook to Literature. Rev. and enl. by C. H. Holman (New York, 1960), p. 156.

Quarulous, can look after themselves. Perhaps the best definition of the type of suspense generated by comedy is the OED's which calls it,

A state of mental uncertainty, with expectation of or desire for decision, and usually some apprehension or anxiety; the condition of waiting, esp. of being kept waiting for an expected decision, assurance or issue. . . .²

If one adds "an expected desired decision," this definition is particularly applicable to comedy.

Significantly, it seems to be the humorists themselves who have recognized the importance of suspense in generating laughter. Mark Twain practiced the humor of fulfilling expectations, and praised that type of storytelling, which he felt was uniquely American, at the expense of the joke with the surprise or punch line at the end.³ Later comedians have come independently to the same conclusion. Max Eastman relates this part of a conversation with W. C. Fields,

'It seems in general,' he said, 'as though people laugh only at the unexpected, and yet sometimes they laugh still harder exactly because they expect something. For instance, I play the part of a stupid and cocky person who has invented a burglar trap. I explain to the audience how I shall make friends with the burglar, and invite him to sit down and talk things over, and I show how the instant his rear touches the chair bottom, a lever will release a huge iron ball which will hit him on the head and kill him instantly. From then on the audience knows what's coming. They know that I am going to forget

²Definition 3, the first to describe the word's use as a mental or emotional condition.

³See How to Tell a Story (New York, 1902).

about my invention and sit down in the chair myself. They begin laughing when I start toward the chair, and their laughter is at its peak before the ball hits me. How do you explain that?⁴

Al Capp finds the humor of Charlie Chaplin's comedies also to lie not in surprise, but in the fact that our expectations are fulfilled,

We laughed at Chaplin's romance because no matter how often we had been licked, we could get started again and it might come out good; and because, on the other hand (and a comforting thing it was for us to realize), no matter how often he started again, it couldn't come out anything but bad, because he was licked before he started.

We knew that once the lame girl who looked fondly up at him from her wheelchair could walk, she'd walk away from him. . . .

We felt fine watching Chaplin's courtships because he gave us a couple of things that make men feel fine. Omniscience: we know something the poor little bum didn't know--that he didn't have a chance.⁵

In another article⁶ Capp acknowledges his own debt to the classical suspense comic strips, such as Dick Tracy, and discusses how he uses the same techniques to play with his readers' anticipations. More recently, Mel Brooks, in an interview published in the New York Times magazine section stated, "Comedy is not surprise, it's knowing. How does it work, how does it laminate? Seeing

⁴Enjoyment of Laughter (New York, 1948), pp. 93-94.

⁵"The Comedy of Charlie Chaplin," The Atlantic Monthly, Feb. 1950, pp. 28-9. Capp goes on to say that the other emotion we experience is security because knowing that no girl will ever want Chaplin makes us realize that some do want us.

⁶"It's Hideously True," Life, 31 March 1952, pp. 100-08.

it on the horizon, expecting, unable to stop it."⁷

Experience proves the humorists correct and testifies that laughter is frequently dependent upon foreknowledge. How often the teller of a joke, the only one who knows the conclusion, will take the most delight in his tale. He will barely be able to choke out the punch line between chortles, while his audience tries to look amused or titters politely. We all know too of jokes and anecdotes that will amuse us time and time again, and whose remembrance alone will frequently make us laugh. In these cases pleasure is not derived from surprise, but from the fulfillment of our expectations.

In many comic situations as well, the outcome is known, and only when or how it will be achieved is in doubt. Bergson and many others have sought to explain why we laugh at a man falling on ice, but a good part of the reason probably lies in the fact that we knew all along that he was going to fall. If we saw only the act itself, our sense of propriety would probably overcome our amusement about how awkward he looked, and we would express concern rather than burst into laughter. If, on the other hand, we have seen the patch of ice and the inattentive man approaching, we know what is going to happen, and as he nears our tension increases until it explodes into laughter when he actually does fall. We derive double satisfaction, not only because the man

⁷30 March 1975, p. 28.

looked so silly on the way down, but because our expectations have been proven correct.

The practical joke exploits the same kind of humor, but in this case the setting is arranged rather than occurring by chance. Surprise plays no part at all in the delight of practical jokes--the only one surprised is the victim, and he is the only one who is not amused. Rather, the pleasure is derived from knowing what is going to happen and seeing the plans come to fruition. Samuel Seward comments on the role of anticipation in the practical joke,

This involves, for one thing, the charm of a conspiracy. It implies a victim, too, like as not chosen for some trait agreed on as defective. A delightful period of suspense follows, while the victim is being lured to his fate. And when the trap is sprung, there is the actual picture that has danced before the imaginations of the hushed conspirators: the abject victim drenched perhaps in body and dazed in mind.⁸

It should be noted that the effect of the joke is enhanced because the spectacle corresponds to what had been anticipated.⁹

If suspense plays an active part in jokes and in funny situations of short duration, it assumes an even greater importance in drama where our attention must be maintained for several hours. A play which simply strings

⁸The Paradox of the Ludicrous (Stanford, 1930), p. 23.

⁹It is easy to invent other hypothetical cases where humor would result if the end of the action were known beforehand and desired. I would speculate that farce was introduced into professional wrestling when the observers knew that the outcome was fixed. The feigned violence, the groaning and grimacing are mere embellishments.

together witticisms rapidly becomes tedious. One is struck in fact, when looking over the text of any good comedy with how few jokes there are. Furthermore, when these are quoted out of the context of the play and are deprived of the heightening effect provided by suspense and situation, how pitifully flat they seem. Most comedies do not "read" well--a person alone with his book is unlikely to gain much enjoyment from the funny lines unless he is able to imagine the setting and the player speaking them.

Just as good dramatic comedy is not overly dependent upon verbal wit, it also shuns a plethora of surprises in situations. As Paula Johnson comments,

Everyone knows of plays and stories in which too much happens; instead of the single line of power arching its way from start to finish, a collection of minor surprises serves to keep the work in motion. This is in the main a literary liability. . . .¹⁰

Comedy depends upon the arousal of our anticipations; when the drama is over-laden with surprises, we cease to expect anything and become numb to the action.¹¹

The successful comic plot, then, must temper surprises with confirmation of the audience's anticipations. Charles Morgan, in a provocative article "The Nature of Dramatic Illusion," notes that since the structure of a

¹⁰Form and Transformation in Music and Poetry of the English Renaissance (New Haven, 1972), p. 151.

¹¹On the parallel reaction to music, see Leonard Meyer's Music, the Arts, and Ideas (Chicago, 1967), p. 220.

play only reveals itself during the course of time, all drama produces an innate tension which he calls "suspense of form." He elaborates,

A play's performance occupies two or three hours. Until the end its form is latent in it. It follows that during the performance we are not influenced by the form itself, the completed thing, but by our anticipations of completion. We are, so to speak, waiting for the suspended rhyme or harmony, and this formal suspense has the greater power if we know beforehand, as the Greeks did, what the formal release is to be.¹²

In dramatic comedy there is indeed rarely uncertainty over what the final outcome will be--Lysistrata will arrange a peace settlement between the Spartans and the Athenians, Noah's wife will finally get on the ark, and Ann will manage to trap Tanner.¹³

At the start of the play, the comic dramatist does two things to promote the proper kind of suspense: he assures the audience that the play is in fact a comedy and that the outcome will be a desired one, and he provides us with the essential facts to enable us to foresee the final resolution. In the first task he is assisted both by the setting and by what the psychologists

¹²In Essays by Divers Hands (Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature), 3rd ser. vol. 12, ed. R. W. Macan (London, 1933), p. 71.

¹³Of course sometimes the author will introduce a surprise in the ending, as when we discover that the wife in Epicoene is really a man, or the bombs fall at the end of Heartbreak House. The surprise lies in the introduction of a new event, however, not the contradiction of the audience's anticipations. The expected action has already been completed--Epicoene is indeed married, the love games in Heartbreak House have progressed predictably.

call the "set"--the attitude each member of the audience brings to the play. For the Greek audience, the setting, when the play was performed, assured that the play would be a comedy. This knowledge was underscored by the masks and the color of the costumes. For us, the set is probably more of a determining factor. We rarely see a play we have heard nothing about, and even then we are provided with important information by the program. The title All's Well That Ends Well provides necessary comfort when the outlook is bleak for Bertram and Helena, and noting that Heartbreak House is by Shaw alerts us not to anticipate melodrama.

Assurance of a happy ending is also frequently provided at the outset of the plays themselves. Sometimes the playwright uses the prologue to set the comic tone--as do Jonson in Bartholomew Fair, and Shaw in Androcles and the Lion. A similar function is served by the Induction to The Taming of the Shrew. In the absence of a prologue, the opening lines can ensure that we are plunged into a world of comedy. One of the most obvious examples of this is the beginning of The Frogs where the first line is spoken by Dionysus's slave, "Well, Master, we seem to be here. I suppose you want me to entertain the audience with one of my jokes." The Merry Wives of Windsor and Candida are other examples of plays leading off with humorous dialogue.

These techniques establish a light tone in the

play and a receptive mood in the audience. Freud remarks,

. . . a favorable condition is produced by the expectation of the comic or by putting one's self in the right mood for comic pleasure. . . . He who decides to attend a comic lecture or a farce at the theater is indebted to this intention for laughing over things which in his everyday life could hardly produce a comic effect. He finally laughs at the recollection of having laughed, at the expectation of laughing, and at the appearance of the one who is to present the comic.¹⁴

While Freud perhaps gives too much credit to the viewer for arousing the pleasurable feeling and not enough to the playwright, we all know how the success of the opening scene of a drama, or the first jokes of a comedian can generate a willingness in the audience to laugh at everything that follows. The producers of television shows recognize the importance of instilling this mood and thus provide a "warm-up" period before each comedy to start the audience laughing.

Humorous dialogue in the opening scenes serves the further function of indicating how characters will fare in the drama. As William McCollom points out, the verbal mastery of the wit foreshadows his success in the drama, while the obtuseness of the witless indicates to the audience that he will be defeated.¹⁵ This technique is most apparent in Restoration comedy--the audience is tipped off, for instance, that Horner will triumph over Pinchwife--but it also influences our attitude in

¹⁴"Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious," in The Basic Writings, ed. and trans., A. A. Brill (New York, 1938), p. 790.

¹⁵The Divine Average (Cleveland, 1971), p. 107.

other comedies. Benedick and Beatrice will succeed in part simply because they are so lively and Don John is such a bore. Similarly, we expect from the quick-wittedness of Quarlous and Winwife that they will be able to woo Grace away from Bartholomew Cokes in Bartholomew Fair.

The playwright also uses the opening scenes to impart information to the audience. In the Greek New Comedy, the prologue reveals secrets to the audience that are hidden from the characters,¹⁶ and later dramatists, such as Jonson, were fond of employing prologues to indicate the main direction that the drama was going to take. In like manner Euelpides in The Birds, after only twenty-eight lines of dialogue, sums up his and Peis-thetaerus's situation and tells what they hope to accomplish by fleeing Athens. Lysistrata announces her plans with similar haste. Shakespeare often uses opening monologues to provide the audience with necessary information--Love's Labour's Lost, Measure for Measure, and As You Like It, all start in this manner. Whatever the methods they use, comic dramatists provide us insight at the beginning of the play so that the audience can know what to expect in the action that follows.

By the end of the opening scenes, then, the audience is in a state of suspense as we await the

¹⁶See Alan Thompson, The Dry Mock (Berkeley, 1948), p. 91.

anticipated resolution. Comedy does not, however, move inexorably toward this conclusion. Instead it proceeds haltingly by jolts and starts, as the writer introduces diversions and delays. Surprising obstacles to the anticipated ending are an essential part of the fabric of any comic plot.

Leonard Meyer notes that we all possess "latent expectations"--that we will get up in the morning, turn up the thermostat, have breakfast, and perform countless other acts without having to plan them in advance. These can become "active anticipations" when our normal routine is disrupted--we oversleep, or the furnace fails to respond to the adjustment of the thermostat--and we become aware of what we had previously assumed was assured. The disturbance then forces us to recognize both itself and our normal anticipations. Meyer applies this pattern to music commenting, "Musical meaning, then, arises when our expectant habit responses are delayed or blocked--when the normal course of stylistic-mental events is disturbed by some form of deviation."¹⁷ The statement also applies to comedy: the play would have no meaning for us if the action progressed without deviation toward the preconceived ending. The blocking actions frequently surprise the audience, but they do not eliminate suspense since they also call attention to our expectations for the ending. "If not thus, how?" the audience must ask, or

¹⁷pp. 9-10.

"if not now, when?"

It is significant that in comedy the characters are fairly stable and the jarring of our expectations results from the twists in the action. The characters' attitudes may change, as for example, Benedick's and Beatrice's towards each other, but their fundamental personalities remain unaltered. At the end of the comedy, the foolish are still unenlightened, the virtuous still uncorrupted. Events, not personalities, are thus most often responsible for the disruption of the audience's anticipations. When we think that we have found the answer to the questions of how or when the comic resolution is to be achieved, a new episode is introduced which overturns our expectations. Thus in The Birds, Peisthetærus's sacrifice is repeatedly delayed by the sudden appearance of a new intruder, Volpone's wooing of Celia is postponed by the unexpected visit of Lady Would-Be, and the love games in Heartbreak House are disrupted by the discovery of a burglar. The playwright introduces these surprising complications to force the audience to constantly re-evaluate what is probable and what unlikely. The interruptions and wanderings in the central action not only prevent boredom but also add to our pleasure when the foreseen happy ending arrives.

Suspense works with surprise to increase the pleasure of the ending. Meyer remarks in Emotion and Meaning in Music, "the state of suspense involves an

an awareness of the powerlessness of man in the face of the unknown."¹⁸ This is certainly true of the standard mystery suspense. We want to scream at the girl that she will be strangled if she goes through the door upstairs, but we have no more power than she to avert her fate. In comedy, though, suspense has quite the opposite effect. Danger may threaten, but it will always be averted. The girl's hand may touch the door knob, but at the last moment, as though heeding our warnings, she will reconsider and walk away. Furthermore, since the ending we have been anticipating all along is the desired one, we feel a sense of triumph when it is finally achieved.

Susanne Langer has defined "comic action" as "the upset and recovery of the protagonist's equilibrium, his contest with the world and his triumph by wit, luck, personal power, or even humorous, or ironical, or philosophical acceptance of mischance."¹⁹ The pleasure of comedy is indeed largely derived from its assurance of the strength of personality when confronted with intractable circumstance. In tragedy the protagonist's personality becomes so inextricably bound with events that the conclusion seems the inevitable working of destiny. In comedy there is no such paralleling of circumstances and personality: when a character meets with

¹⁸(Chicago, 1956), p. 29.

¹⁹Feeling and Form (New York, 1953), p. 331.

an unexpected occurrence or an opposing will, instead of becoming enmeshed with it, he is likely to collide and then rebound in a new direction. Comedy's optimistic conclusion is that for better or for worse man can retain his personality through the flux of experience. From Dicaeopolis in The Acharnians to Ruth in The Homecoming, we are confronted with characters who not only survive the plot's threats and surprises, but who can frequently manipulate these to their advantage. Even those who do not thrive in the comic plot, like Cokes in Bartholomew Fair or Lyubov Andreyevna in The Cherry Orchard retain a certain dignity precisely because they refuse to adapt their conduct to the exigencies of their surroundings.

"All's well that ends well," comedy asserts, and frequently the play's action tells the story of characters overcoming either outward or self-imposed impediments to their happiness. If we witness a genuine obstacle, the audience is likely to be impressed by the mastery of the characters in overcoming difficult circumstances. For example, we admire the quickness of wit and the ingenuity displayed by Bluntschli in Arms and the Man. If, instead, the characters erect the barriers themselves, as Sir Politic does in Volpone, our attention is likely to be focused on our own superior insight and the playwright's mastery in manipulating the exposure of the characters' blindness. In either case, the audience is always the real victor. A character confronts events

with action which may be misguided and cause his disappointment; the audience's involvement, our responses and anticipations, are proven correct. Surprises may upset the audience's equilibrium from time to time, but in the end our expectations are fulfilled and, as if at our behest, a satisfying resolution is achieved.

The purpose of this study will be to show how suspense is used to manipulate the audience's expectations and to underscore this comic concept of the power of man, in what I view as two fundamentally different types of comic plots. The more familiar kind of plot employs a narrative in which the action advances from an initially unstable situation, through a series of complications, to a satisfying conclusion. The second type, which has received less commentary, does not tell a story, but instead explores a situation. Forward movement is replaced by elaboration of overtones.

This second type of plot, in its modern version, has been described by Marvin Rosenberg in a significant article entitled "A Metaphor for Dramatic Form."²⁰ Rosenberg proposes that many modern playwrights have sensed the inadequacy of the conventional linear plot to reflect their common experience. An alternate form of drama was sought which would mirror more accurately the essential anarchism of thoughts and sensations. Progression was

²⁰JAAC, 17 (Dec. 1958), 174-180.

thus abandoned: "non-linear drama set out to recognize the ambiguity of all human behavior, rather than the chain-link effects of isolated acts." This new form Rosenberg calls "contextual" because "the tensions of context, rather than direction, of vertical depth, rather than horizontal movement, became important." Rosenberg is certainly correct in indicating that modern playwrights have abandoned narrative in favor of plays which seek to explore a condition. I would disagree, however, that this form is totally new, and would suggest that the contextual plot has its own history. Both linear and contextual plots are found in ancient Greek drama, and the latter was in fact one of the original forms of comedy.

As in modern dramas, causal links are weak in Aristophanes's plays, and the advancement of a story line is less important than elaboration upon a situation. Schlegel pointed out,

In the Old Comedy, the form was sportive, and a seeming aimlessness reigned throughout: the whole poem was one big jest which again contained within itself a world of separate jests, of which each occupied its own place, without appearing to trouble itself about the rest.²¹

Just as in a modern play like Waiting for Godot, individual episodes in the Old Comedy are introduced for their own sakes, without any regard to furthering the central action.

²¹"Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature" (no. XI), 1815; quoted in Paul Lauter, ed. Theories of Comedy (Garden City, N.Y., 1964), p. 331.

Although the consecutive plot was the one commonly adopted by subsequent comic playwrights, the contextual plot or the plot of elaboration found in Aristophanes was not altogether abandoned. Critics have not recognized it as a distinct tradition, but their comments on different plays are often similar and echo Rosenberg's description of modern drama. John Enck, discussing Jonson's Bartholomew Fair, notes, "The structure is slight, and episodes digress at many points . . . the construction does not seek tightness; everything depends upon the prevailing atmosphere."²² Enck's comment is clearly appropriate for most contextual drama: causal relations are minimal and most plays, including those as widely separated in time as Thesmophoriazusae and The Rhinoceros rely upon the "prevailing atmosphere" for their humor.

More recently, both Chekhov and Shaw rejected the consecutive plot in favor of plays of indirect action. Robert Corrigan, in commenting upon Chekhov's plays, almost mimics Rosenberg's concluding remarks about contextual drama. Rosenberg writes,

This drama's form is flux; as if the playwrights are reaching, in the second part of the usual linear equation, 'Life is -----,' for a statement so vast and ambiguous and disturbing that it seems indeed, they are bent on discarding limiting terms altogether in favor of a simple declarative sentence: 'Life is.'²³

²²Jonson and the Comic Truth (Madison, Wisc., 1957), p. 191.

²³p. 180.

Corrigan relates the following anecdote,

Shortly before he died, Chekhov's wife asked him what he thought the meaning of life was. He replied: 'You ask me what life is. It is like asking what a carrot is. A carrot is a carrot, and nothing more is known.'

Corrigan concludes,

Therein lies the basic secret, both in meaning and form of Chekhov's drama. He did not believe that 'life is something': all of his plays are expressions of the proposition that 'life is'. . . . Such an idea of the theatre has tremendous implications for the drama. . . . First of all, it abolishes the traditional linear plot, because Chekhov was not interested in presenting an action in any Aristotelian sense, but rather he was dramatizing a condition.²⁴

Shaw too became more interested in "dramatizing a condition" than in "presenting an action." In response to the question, what is the finest dramatic situation, he remarked,

I cannot answer the question, as my mind does not work in superlatives. Even if it did I should still have to point out that plays with detachable situations in them are comparatively cheap, simple, mechanical products--melodramas in short. . . . A first-rate play seems nowadays to have no situation, just as Wagner's music seemed to our grandfathers to have no melody, because it was all melody from beginning to end. The best plays consist of a single situation lasting several hours.²⁵

This is close to Schlegel's description of Aristophanic comedy as "one big jest" and to Rosenberg's statement that modern contextual drama seeks "to escape the tyranny of time progression, to catch the myriad dimensions of

²⁴Six Plays of Chekhov (New York, 1962), p. xviii.

²⁵The Strand Magazine, 30 (Feb. 1906); rpt. in E. J. West, ed. Shaw on Theatre (New York, 1958), p. 110.

the present."²⁶

From these comments and attention to the plays themselves, one can deduce the major components of non-consecutive or contextual plotting. First, the playwright is not concerned with telling an exciting story. In conventional plots, the initial situation presented demands further action--in All's Well That Ends Well, for example, Helena will try to win Bertram's love, in Volpone, Volpone and Mosca will attempt to further beguile their dupes. The play ends once the characters have either succeeded or been exposed in their schemes, and harmony has been established. In contextual plots, stasis is achieved very near the beginning of the play.

Second, once the situation has been presented, the audience is not encouraged to ask, "what happens next?" because the plot does not advance through an orderly pattern of major events. After the initial action, if indeed there is an initial action, the plot pirouettes as it were, allowing the audience to examine all sides of the situation. The action has no governing purpose, and the characters' experience is more apt to be governed by random events than by planning. Even Peisthetairus must devote most of his energies to combatting fortuitous intrusions, and energetic characters such as Rabbi Busy, the hypocritical Puritan in Bartholomew Fair, and Ellie Dunn, the working girl who finds herself

²⁶p. 176.

engrossed in a weekend's events at Heartbreak House, are unable to formulate designs to change their situation.

Finally, the endings of these plays are usually abrupt and arbitrarily introduced. The audience has the feeling that the dance could go on forever: the action is not resolved, the playwright has simply called a halt. There is no internal reason for the timing of Zeus's petition for peace in The Birds, or for the auction in The Cherry Orchard, they are simply necessary for the dramatists to end their plays. Even more obviously manufactured are the endings of Love's Labour's Lost and Heartbreak House where the author must extricate himself by means of an unforeseen, startling interference by fate.

All three of these components--the early achievement of stasis, the structuring of events by chance rather than by design, and the arbitrary determination of the ending--fundamentally affect the role of suspense in the drama. Since there is no strong story line and the audience's attention is diverted from the question of what is going to happen next to resolve the initial problem, suspense concerning how and when announced intentions will be carried out, or when and how characters will achieve self-awareness, is muted. Because there is little emphasis on motivation, we are surprised more frequently than in the linear plot. In fact, without the check of a certain amount of suspense, the play threatens

to frolic and cavort purposelessly. Suspense is thus more difficult to evoke and at the same time more vital in contextual plots than in the traditional linear drama.

In the selection of plays for this study I have been guided by three criteria. First that both the playwright and myself as viewer, agree on the work as comedy. I have thus excluded The Seagull since I am unable to respond to it as Chekhov intended, and have confined my investigation of Waiting for Godot, a tragicomedy, to a few remarks in the conclusion. Second, that the plays be representative both of the author and of the two types of plot that concern me. I have selected, therefore, one of Shakespeare's "mature comedies," one of his "problem comedies," and one "romance." Having discussed these plays I felt no need to include Restoration drama since it offers little new in terms of plot structure. The final criterion is quality. I have chosen Heartbreak House over some of Shaw's later plays such as Too True to be Good because the former strikes me as a better work. I must add that in some selections my own taste was the sole arbiter. I simply prefer The Birds to The Clouds, Volpone to The Alchemist.

In technique, I will be discussing the plays as what Paula Johnson calls "serial art."²⁷ That is, I will not be dealing with the parts of the drama that can be reconstructed in retrospect but with the ways the playwright leads and misleads us as the play moves through time. In

²⁷ pp. 1-28.

doing so, I postulate an ideally responsive audience-- not one which is necessarily aware of the historical framework or the conventions of the drama, but which is sensitive to each promise of future action and insight into personality which the author intimates.

A final disclaimer: I must necessarily restrict my study almost exclusively to the written text. This is, of course, only a part of the drama, and the action which accompanies lines can also be important in manipulating the audience's expectations. Suspense can especially be heightened by the reactions of characters on stage who are temporarily silent. Attention in Act IV of The Winter's Tale, for example, must be divided between the loving banter of Florizel and Perdita, and the taciturn Polixenes who stays through two dances and the intrusion of Autolycus before revealing his identity. Tension can be increased in IV. iv. of Volpone if Volpone is so delighted with watching Mosca inform the dupes of their disinheritance, that he sometimes drops his guard and comes close to revealing himself. Unfortunately, a study which includes how production can intensify the effects described would demand a writer more versed in theater technique than myself, and probably would have to be restricted to fewer plays in order not to become unwieldy.

CHAPTER II

THE BIRDS: SUSPENSE FROM INTERRUPTION

To an audience accustomed to linear plots, the absence of a strong narrative may give Aristophanes's comedies the appearance of amorphism. Like many modern dramas, the distinguishing and disquieting element in the structure of Aristophanes's plays is that what is introduced is not determined solely by the requirements of the plot. In linear drama each episode advances the story line. The watch in Much Ado About Nothing, for example, is a delight in itself, but it also has an important role in resolving the action. In Aristophanes's plays, on the other hand, a large percentage of the cast could be eliminated without injury to the plot. What is the need for two itinerant poets visiting Cloudecuckooland in The Birds, or two informers being beaten off by Dicaeopolis in The Acharnians? Although there is usually a formal beginning and ending in Aristophanes's drama, in the middle the play stands still. There is repetition instead of development. The world of the Old Comedy is a world of chance and characters may arrive or depart for no apparent reason.

This chapter will examine how Aristophanes used suspense to control his plot and govern his audience's reactions in The Birds. There will be no attempt to capture the original responses of the Greek audience. Scholars do have some information on how and when Greek comedies

were staged, but they do not know such important facts as who witnessed the performances--for instance, were women allowed to attend? Conjecture concerning the original audience's responses to individual episodes would therefore be futile. Still, in order for the plays to speak to us now, we must be aware, as the playwright certainly was, of the Greek audience's basic expectations for the comedy. The most important factor is that the comedy would be staged late in the festival; attention could easily flag and lively entertainment was thus a prerequisite to the play's success. The spectators would be looking forward to the entrance of the chorus--always brightly costumed--who would amuse them with dances and songs. If the plays of Aristophanes are typical of Old Comedy, the audience would also be expecting to be entertained by the bawdy jokes and out-spoken personal abuse peppered throughout the drama.

In the structure of the play, the audience would be anticipating an agon, or contest between opposing wills, a parabasis in which the action is halted and the spectators are addressed directly, and various choral interludes. The audience would know the general direction of the plot and would expect to see a person of great cleverness assert his will and defeat various impostors and buffoons. To appreciate Aristophanes's use of suspense and surprise, we must make these expectations our own.

Aristophanes's skill in evoking suspense and

surprise is demonstrated in The Birds. The disparate elements of classical Old Comedy are retained in this play, but they are fully integrated with the governing idea of the the play. The premise of all comedy is that man is able to retain his identity through the flux of experience. The Birds goes one step further and asserts that man can successfully re-mold this experience. By the use of language, Peisthetaerus is able to found his own city, and through its power to overcome every obstacle, eventually subduing the gods themselves. There can be no consistent blocking action since Peisthetaerus is endowed with this power from the beginning and can out-talk anyone he meets. The plot is discontinuous, which enables the audience to witness numerous demonstrations of Peisthetaerus's mastery.

The first three parts of The Birds--the prologue which sets forth the main themes, the parados when the chorus enters, and the agon or contest--contain the central action of the play, and suspense is frequently evoked by means similar to those in the traditional linear plot. The play starts with Euelpides's query about where he and Peisthetaerus are headed. For the next fifteen lines no hint is given as to the mission of the two men, and we wonder who these people are and what they are doing. Euelpides eventually answers the latter question with his curse on the bird-seller who said that the crow and daw would lead them to Tereus,

the hoopoe. Then in the speech beginning on line 29, he addresses the audience directly and explains the purpose of their search:

but our Athenians chirp
Over their lawsuits all their whole life long,
That's why we are journeying on this journey now,
Tereus, the hoopoe, is our journey's aim,
To learn if he, in any place he has flown to
Has seen the sort of city that we want,¹
(p. 6)¹

When Euelpides and Peisthetaerus meet the hoopoe, they follow through with their announced intentions and ask his advice as to what would be a soft, comfortable city. Euelpides is chary of all suggestions, however, and has begun to ask about life among the birds when he is suddenly interrupted by Peisthetaerus's exclamation, "O the grand scheme I see in the birds' reach/ And power to grasp it, if ye'd trust to me!" (p. 11).

To this point Euelpides has been our guide to the action and has provided background information. From here on, it is Peisthetaerus who assumes command of the plot and manipulates our reactions. Suspense centers on whether or not Peisthetaerus will be able to succeed in his

¹Translating Aristophanes is a formidable undertaking because one must either sacrifice his verse or the literalness of his statement. I have used translations by R. H. Webb, William Arrowsmith, Dudley Fitts, and B. B. Rogers, as well as consulting the notes to W. W. Merry's untranslated edition. The language of Rogers's translation is sometimes prudish or archaic, but it offers the most literal translation, and quotations cited here are from his translation in Five Comedies of Aristophanes (Garden City, N. Y., 1955) unless otherwise noted. Because the lines are not numbered in any translation, references will be to page numbers.

plan. Later, after he has overcome the major obstacles, the focus is on how or when his success will be achieved. Peisthetaerus first convinces the hoopoe, through an admirable bit of sophistry involving the similarity between the words "pole" and "polity," that the air between the earth and the heavens is the natural kingdom of the birds, and the hoopoe agrees to help erect the city if Peisthetaerus can persuade the other birds to concur. The action is interrupted by two songs calling the birds to assemble. The lyrical language of the two songs contrasts with Peisthetaerus's scepticism that the birds will come, "Methinks the Hoopoe played the lapwing's trick./ Went in the copse, and whooped, and whooped for nothing" (p. 15). Peisthetaerus, the master manipulator of language, judges the song's beauty by its effectiveness.

In the prologue Aristophanes has established the pattern of raising suspense that he will follow for the rest of the play. When the action is progressing so that the attention of the audience is directed toward what is going to happen next, Aristophanes strives to relieve the suspense. On the other hand, when there is a structural break in the play, a point of plot is left unresolved so that suspense is heightened.

At the beginning of the prologue, the plot proceeds without major diversion, and suspense is undercut. In many plays, a large measure of suspense is generated over when characters will attain the audience's knowledge

or insight. Shakespeare's The Comedy of Errors, for example, has the audience wonder when the sets of twins will discover that their brothers are also in Ephesus. In Jonson's Volpone, the audience is interested in when and how the petitioners will find out that they are being duped. In The Birds, the main characters share the audience's level of awareness, and this suspense is completely eliminated. The characters know no more than we; the audience is kept informed of their motivations, intentions, and actions. We are told why Euelpides and Peisthetaerus are seeking the hoopoe and therefore can anticipate their questions when they meet him. In addition, since the interval between the announcement of the character's intentions and the execution of the action is always short, we are not particularly concerned about when or how the plans will be carried out. The audience does not know less than the characters, but in contrast to a play like The Comedy of Errors, we do not know more either. Peisthetaerus is on stage during the whole course of the drama except when the chorus is addressing the audience directly, and we never have the chance to overhear conversation denied him. Once the chorus hears of the plan to found the city, every other character who enters knows this fundamental fact except Iris, and she is quickly informed.

If there is little suspense over when characters will attain our knowledge, there is even less over when

they will acquire our insight. The hoopoe, of course, is a bird, and we do not anticipate that he will trouble himself with problems of self-awareness. Euelpides and Peisthetaerus near the beginning of the play are sometimes ridiculous, as in their extreme terror at the servant bird, but even Euelpides can display wit and cleverness that we must admire. Clearly neither character is a fool or villain with obvious faults crying for correction or punishment, and it is impossible to feel superior to either. Indeed, by the end of the play the audience must applaud Peisthetaerus's dexterity in getting his own way.

Tension is also diminished by the comic atmosphere established at the beginning of the play. As in many comedies, the beginning of The Birds abounds in witty dialogue and puns, so that even though the audience is initially uncertain of what is going to happen, we are assured that there is no reason for anxiety. Aristophanes's world is more removed from the day-to-day one, however, than that of most traditional comedies, and is akin to twentieth century fantastic comedies, such as Ionesco's plays. Not only is it peopled only by wits, lovers, and clowns, but normal rules of conduct do not apply. Cedric Whitman observes that in both tragedy and comedy, the crisis involves the hero making a decision,

If he chooses yea, he accepts his responsibility, or 'guilt' as it is sometimes called; if nay, he denies his responsibility and therewith his

authenticity as a person. . . . In tragedy the choice is ineluctable . . . there is never a third alternative. But herein comedy differs, and its difference responds to the helpless wish of the spirit writhing before an ineluctable choice; comedy invents a third alternative and rides happily off on it.²

In The Birds this crux occurs very early in the play, when Euelpides and Peisthetaerus must decide whether to "accept responsibility" and return to Athens or to flee to one of the equally undesirable locations proposed by the hoopoe. Faced with this choice, Peisthetaerus comes up with a third option: he will form his own kingdom of the birds. Once the audience accepts Peisthetaerus's power to make this decision, and we are as easily convinced as the hoopoe, Aristophanes has already broken down our barriers to the improbable, and we are receptive to the ensuing action, come what may. Suspense is diminished precisely because we are not sure what to anticipate. No event can be ruled out as impossible, and the audience is discouraged from predicting what will happen next.

The same inverse relation between suspense and surprise carries into the dialogue. When the plot is conducive to suspense, there is a high degree of verbal surprise. Thus in the opening scene when our attention is focused on what these two old men are doing with their birds, there are several puns and unexpected contemporary allusions. Similarly, when the hoopoe

² Aristophanes and the Comic Hero (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), p. 262.

proposes various cites as possible immigration spots and there is tension over what Euelpides's reaction will be, he invariably responds with a jest. When the hoopoe suggests a city by the Red Sea, Euelpides is aghast:

Not by the sea! Not where
The Salaminian, with a process-server
On board, may heave in sight some early morn.
(p. 10)

To the hoopoe's next proposal, that they settle in Elis at Lepreus, Euelpides pretends misunderstanding and exclaims, "Leprous! I was never there,/ But for Melanthius' sake I loathe the name" (p. 11). Whenever we expect a serious response from Euelpides, we almost invariably get a joke.

All of these techniques are used to diminish suspense in the first part of the prologue. The audience is discouraged from anticipating either responses or actions, and interest is centered on what is presently taking place on stage. Before the prologue is interrupted by the songs near its end, however, Aristophanes is careful to focus our attention on future events. The songs occur at the moment of greatest suspense so far: the hoopoe will agree to the plan if Peisthetaerus can persuade the other birds. After the hoopoe announces that he will call a convention, the urgency of the situation is reflected in Peisthetaerus's interjection:

You darling bird, now don't delay one instant.
O I beseech you get at once within
Your little copse and wake the nightingale!
(p. 13)

At this point, when it is impossible to keep the plot out of mind, the two songs intervene.

The songs themselves are tightly structured units with no verbal surprises, and their movement is from the strictly lyrical to the final chorus which reunites us with the plot,

For hither has come a shrewd old file
Such a deep old file, such a sharp old file,
His thoughts are new, new deeds he'll do,
Come here, and confer with this shrewd old file.
(p. 14)

Although the songs represent a structural break in the action, their placement serves to heighten suspense. The delay causes the spectators to look forward even more eagerly to the entrance of the chorus and to Peisthetaerus's effort to persuade them. The suspense is restored at the end of the prologue by Euelpides's and Peisthetaerus's doubt that the birds will heed the summons.

The parados follows the same pattern of relieving tension that is mounting too rapidly and reintroducing suspense when our attention might wander. Our expectation of the appearance of the chorus is drawn out by the members initially entering one at a time. The tension is relaxed at regular intervals by surprising comparisons between the birds and contemporary figures--Kallian, Hipponokos, the Carians, and Sporgilus all find their counterparts among the birds. Once the entire chorus is on the stage, and our interest in the plot could ebb, suspense is immediately provoked by

Peisthetaerus's and Euelpides's reactions:

P. O Poseidon, what the mischief! see the birds are
everywhere
Fluttering onward.

E. King Apollo, what a cloud!
O! O! look there,
Now we cannot see the entrance for the numbers
crowding in.

(p. 16)

The tension is increased a few lines later when the two Athenians become anxious about the chorus's apparent hostility:

E. Do you think they're dangerous?

P. Their beaks are
wide open
And they're certainly looking hard at both of us.³

Once the actual battle begins, suspense is undercut once again by periodic contemporary allusions--to an adage about owls avoiding pots, to Nicias, to public burial in Cera-meicus. At the end of the section suspense and anticipation are again aroused; the chorus has been subdued but has not yet heard Peisthetaerus's scheme, nor been persuaded to follow it.

The agon was traditionally a contest, and in The Birds the match is a double one: between Peisthetaerus's argument and the chorus's distrust, and between his rhetoric and Euelpides's surprising deflationary responses.

³From Dudley Fitts's translation, Aristophanes: Four Comedies (New York, 1962), p. 178. Rogers translates:

E. Goodness! are they going to charge us? They are
gazing here, and see

All their beaks they open widely.

P. That's what

occurs to me.

All other translators give Peisthetaerus a much stronger statement.

The situation is conducive to suspense as the audience wonders whether the chorus, which originally sits in stony silence, will be won over by Peisthetaerus's speech. The surprising interjections by Euelpides explaining how he lost his wool coat and his obols, and his readiness to seize upon whatever means of income would be easiest, underscore the humor of the scene. Peisthetaerus is able to ignore Euelpides's distractions, however, and to convince the chorus not only to establish their own city, but if need be, to challenge the Olympians as well. The koryphaios states, "I thought thee at first of my foemen the worst, and lo, I have found thee the wisest/ And best of my friends, and our nation intends to do whatso'er thou advise it" (p. 31).

The agon, too, ends with the promise of future action. First the chorus, acknowledging Peisthetaerus's superior cleverness declares, "So all that by muscle and strength can be done, we Birds will assuredly do,/ But whatever by prudence and skill must be won, we leave altogether to you" (p. 31). The hoopoe agrees and adds urgently, "We must be up and doing!" (p. 32). Peisthetaerus and Euelpides go into the hoopoe's nest to take the magic root for growing wings, and Peisthetaerus's parting remark quickens our interest in further events, "Lead on, and luck go with us" (p. 33). In persuading the chorus, Peisthetaerus has won his hardest battle. We now have less and less doubt about the outcome of Peisthetaerus's

skirmishes; the chief unanswered question is when and how his opponents will be defeated.

After the chorus agrees to Peisthetaerus's plan, no new central action is introduced. The forward movement of the plot is halted, and the play elaborates upon the consequences of Peisthetaerus's decision. The structure of the play changes as well, and scenes showing Peisthetaerus in action alternate with choral interludes. After the agon, when we are looking forward to Peisthetaerus and Euelpides emerging with wings and wondering how the city will be built, the first parabasis intervenes. In most of Aristophanes's plays, the parabasis marks a complete break in the action as the chorus sheds its role in the plot and voices the dramatist's own thoughts on contemporary affairs. In The Birds, however, no such disruption occurs: the action is interrupted but the chorus retains its identity. Although the first parabasis breaks the action of the play, it is consistent with the central idea, and in fact extends the illusion by directly involving the audience. Just as the chorus has been convinced by Peisthetaerus that the birds were the original gods and should regain their kingdom, the koryphaios tries to persuade men, represented by the audience, to acknowledge the birds' divinity. He begins with the theogony, relating how Love first joined Night and Chaos to create the birds. He recites the favors birds bestow on mankind and finally describes the joy that would

ensue if man worshipped the birds. The chorus then interrupts with an ode to the woodland muse, after which the koryphaios states how a man could be happier as a bird. The chorus again interrupts with an antode, and the koryphaios concludes with a list of the benefits of wings. Peisthetaerus's skill at using tricks of language to mask spurious logic succeeded in convincing the chorus; now the koryphaios is trying out the same techniques on the audience.

The scene that immediately follows concludes the action interrupted by the parabasis--Euelpides and Peisthetaerus emerge equipped with wings. In response to the koryphaios's question, Peisthetaerus announces that the next projects are to name the new city and to offer sacrifices to the gods. After Peisthetaerus has come up with the name "Cloudcuckooland," he initiates new action by dispatching Euelpides to oversee construction of the wall. As Peisthetaerus prepares the sacrifice, he encounters the first string of impostors. Each of these encounters produces the purest kind of comic suspense because the outcome is both known and desired. The impostors are amusing in themselves, just as the self-assurance of a man swaggering down the street may bring a smile. But the humor is greatly increased if we know that the man is going to fall, as we know that the impostors will stumble against Peisthetaerus's irritation and higher skill.

Each of the impostors is a mis-user of language. The poet with his atrocious verses, the oracle-monger with gnostic but self-serving pronouncements, Meton with his obscure jargon, the statute-seller who will twist laws to his purpose--all handle language badly. Peisthetaerus is able to defeat each of them in words before he drives them off physically. He thus triumphs over a whole cross-section of society. The audience's suspense and amusement are further heightened because the impostors create a series of interruptions. Each time Peisthetaerus is about to cut into the goat, a new distraction is introduced. The pomposity of each of the impostor's language tips us off that he will be defeated by Peisthetaerus, but we are not sure how or when. Soon the mere appearance of one more impostor becomes funny, because the audience can look forward so confidently to his downfall. Peisthetaerus is able to deal with each newcomer more summarily than the last until he has finally had enough and announces, "Let's get away from this and go within./ And there sacrifice in peace" (p. 48).

Peisthetaerus's departure leaves the stage free for the chorus to recite the second parabasis. Once again some of our attention must remain with Peisthetaerus. Before, the audience waited to see the effects of the hoopoe's magic root; now we await the discovery of the results of the sacrifice. The feeling of disruption is again lessened by having the chorus continue to speak in

character. The first prize is demanded for the play, but in the name of the birds, not by the appearance of a character representing Aristophanes, as in The Clouds, or by listing Aristophanes's accomplishments, as in The Wasps. In the second parabasis too the chorus attempts to adopt Peisthetaerus's persuasiveness, although this time its requests are phrased much more bluntly.

The next scene again begins with the completion of the action interrupted by the parabasis--Peisthetaerus announces that the sacrifice was "most auspicious." He goes on to wonder, "But strange it is no messenger has come/ From the great wall we're building with news" (p. 50). Immediately the messenger arrives with word that the wall has been completed and gives a description of how the feat was accomplished. As soon as Peisthetaerus hears this news, he announces the arrival of a new messenger, "But see! a guard, a messenger from thence/ Is running towards us with a war-dance look!" (p. 51). As the chorus and Peisthetaerus prepare for battle, Iris enters. This is a surprise and a relief from tension since the audience now knows that the kingdom will not be physically threatened. Peisthetaerus, as we might expect, is able to defeat Iris easily in language. First he makes a pun on "fleet" which she cannot understand, then he deflates her highly stylized tragic language with, "Now listen girl; have done with that bombast" (p. 54). Iris goes off sputtering but promising new action, "My father won't

stand this; I vow he won't" (p. 54).

Peisthetaerus now has a new concern, "Speaking of mankind, I am worried about our herald/ It's strange that his commission should keep him so long."⁴ For the third consecutive time, as soon as Peisthetaerus mentions a messenger, he appears. The audience may begin to suspect that Peisthetaerus can evoke their presence at will. This herald brings news that men have gone bird-crazy and will soon be arriving to obtain their wings. The delay caused by a lazy slave heightens the suspense and our anticipation of their arrival.

The first man to come for wings shows that the koryphaios succeeded in the first parabasis: he is a child who would beat his father, the first of those mentioned by the koryphaios who would profit from a bird's life. As before with the impostors, the parade of claimants here evokes the simplest comic suspense. We know from their language that the hero will defeat them and want to see them deflated, but we are uncertain how or when this will be achieved. Peisthetaerus gets rid of the bellicose adolescent by punning on the word "wing" meaning shield, and sending him off to battle. This sets the pattern for Peisthetaerus's disposal of the next two would-be birds. He drives off the poet by playing on

⁴Fitts, p. 222. Rogers translates, "Well, but that herald whom we sent to men,/ 'Tis strange if he should nevermore return" (p. 55). This seems to parallel too closely the bombast previously mocked.

"winged" meaning "beaten by wings" and thwarts the informer's hopes by declaring that talk is the true wings, quite true in his own case, but of no help to the informer. Finally Peisthetaerus announces his retirement, "Now let us gather up the wings and go" (p. 61). We have witnessed the consequences for men of Peisthetaerus's kingdom, and remembering Iris's parting remark, look forward to seeing its effect on the gods.

The ensuing choral interlude abandons attempts at persuasion and instead the birds sing of two "wonders" they have seen--first the coward-informer Kleonymus, then the robber Orestes. Although this interlude does not deal with the theme of the play, it is strongly connected with the plot. Both stanzas discuss unworthy men, like those we have just seen attempting to enter the birds' kingdom. The first stanza is even more closely tied to the previous action since the last man beaten off by Peisthetaerus was an informer like Kleonymus. The second stanza prepares us for the subsequent action; as soon as the chorus departs, one enters who is certainly walking "in dread" and fearful of being stripped and beaten. After a period of suspense during which we wonder who this new arrival is, he finally removes his blankets and the audience is surprised and relieved to find that it is Prometheus, always a friend to mankind. He informs Peisthetaerus that a delegation from the gods, including a barbaric Triballian, will be coming down to petition for

peace. Prometheus further advises not to yield until they have promised Basileia, or Sovereignty, for his wife.

The episode with Prometheus is unnecessary for the plot, since the delegation will soon enter anyway; but it causes suspense by making us anticipate their arrival. It also informs the audience of what terms Peisthetaerus will settle on, thus giving us information denied to the delegation.

Suspense is further heightened when the arrival of the delegation is delayed by another chorikon, or choral interlude. This one deals with Socrates conjuring the soul of Peisander, the coward, from the dead. At last the delegation enters, and any doubts we had about Peisthetaerus's final triumph are nearly removed: Poseidon has some dignity but can exert no control over the other two, the Triballian is a complete moron, and Heracles is little better. As with the previous intruders, we know that Peisthetaerus will be able to outwit the divine trio, and the audience waits with happy expectation to discover when and how his success will occur. This time Peisthetaerus is able to persuade Heracles to vote with him by citing the law that bastards cannot inherit their father's estate. Ironically in this play about the power of language, the deciding vote is the Triballian's meaningless babble which both Peisthetaerus and Heracles interpret as consent. Poseidon grumbles his disagreement, but cannot influence his cohorts. As the delegation leaves, Peisthe-

taerus calls for the wedding robe, and we look forward to the appearance of Basileia and the final dance.

At this point when the audience is keenly anticipating the concluding ceremony, the chorus intervenes with the final interlude, again denouncing informers. The last stanza has special relevance to the play. It concerns a nation of sophists and informers who are able to profit from the use of language:

For a Barbarous tribe it passes,
 Philips all and Gorgiases.
 And from this tongue-bellying band
 Everywhere on Attic land,
 People who a victim slay
 Always cut the tongue away.
 (p. 69)

Who ever profited more from his tongue than Peisthetaerus has in this play? Hasn't he shown himself to be the supreme sophist, eclipsing both Philip and Gorgias? This final song seems to be almost a disclaimer by Aristophanes, a statement that even though we are about to enjoy the wedding of Peisthetaerus with Sovereignty, in real life our approval should not be so easily given.

We are not left to ponder this thought long, however, for a messenger comes in, directing our attention back to the imminent wedding. His speech lasts fourteen lines, quickening our desire to see Peisthetaerus and Basileia. At last they enter, no doubt gorgeously costumed, and the play ends with the chorus's song of praise:

Raise the joyous Paeon-cry
 Raise the song of victory
 Io Paeon, alalalae
 Mightiest of Powers, to thee!
 (p. 71)

Peisthetaerus's apotheosis is complete.

Peisthetaerus's triumph is achieved through his manipulation of words, and the entire drama from the most lyrical ode of the nightingale, to the most scatological of Euelpides's jokes, is a celebration of the powers and the potential of language. This becomes the theme of the play, at first complementing, and then in fact usurping the story line. The non-linear plot serves this theme well since it enables the audience to listen to many voices, to hear many types of language.

Suspense and surprise are used to balance the plot and the governing idea. In the beginning of the play when the story is progressing in a straight-forward fashion, suspense over what is going to happen next is undercut by the personalities of the characters and by verbal surprise. In the second half, where there are frequent structural breaks which further the theme but not the action, suspense is heightened by introducing new points of interest before the interruptions and by characters announcing their intentions in advance of their actions. The atmosphere is one of controlled suspense: the audience is not sure of what will happen next, but we are confident that Peisthetaerus will solve any new problem that might arise. The audience leaves the theater with a feeling of well-being because all of the action we have desired and anticipated has taken place.

The audience has handled its role as spectator

well: our expectations have been proven correct. The Birds demonstrates the mastery of the playwright and of the protagonist as well. Aristophanes does not appear as a character on stage, but he consistently shows his control over events by the introduction of surprising new complications. He insists that the audience evaluate his performance and appreciate his skill. Peisthetaerus's is the most obvious triumph. In later dramas we find characters less and less able to cope with the vicissitudes of the non-linear plot, but Peisthetaerus's power is actually underscored by the episodic structure of The Birds. He is able to handle the unforeseen as well as the expected events with equal aplomb. Peisthetaerus not only retains his identity through the flux of experience; he is able to impress his personality upon that experience until it is completely remolded. Rarely will later comedy assert so boldly man's power over circumstance.

CHAPTER III

SHAKESPEARE'S COMEDIES: SUSPENSE FROM KNOWLEDGE
AND INSIGHT

In The Birds, once Cloudeuckooland has been established, the action becomes disjointed, and suspense is maintained by the timing of interruptions. Suspense is easier to generate in comedies with linear or conventional plots, because the audience's interest follows a narrative which encompasses the entire drama. In these plays a situation or problem is presented in the opening scenes, its complications and ramifications are worked out in subsequent actions, and the curtain falls immediately after the resolution or dénouement. The answers to the questions, "what happens?" and "what is the play about?" are identical, and we would list the major events, always including the final climax. Much Ado About Nothing, for example, could be described as a play about two couples discovering their love. Beatrice and Benedick are at first openly disdainful of each other, but they are beguiled into declaring their love. Claudio, who is initially enamored with Hero, is duped into believing her unchaste. Finally both pairs of lovers are united and their joint wedding is announced. The conclusion is obvious near the beginning of the play, and comic suspense centers on how and when the happy ending will be achieved.

In the most simple linear plots, the audience is given an important piece of information at the start, and suspense is generated over when the characters will discover the secret. As soon as this discovery is made, the climax is reached and the action ends. The main story line in The Comedy of Errors is built upon the audience's knowledge that the two sets of twins are in Ephesus with neither aware of the presence of the other. Suspense builds as the two pairs of twins come closer and closer to meeting, and the comedy develops along with the suspense as the brothers become increasingly entangled in each other's affairs and are still unable to perceive the explanation for their dilemma. The same disparity in awareness is responsible for the humor in episodes of the medieval mystery cycles. Since we have the secret of the Bible, which tells us that Noah's wife will get on the ark, her vehement insistence that she will never leave home is comical. Other plays from Euripides's Antigone to Brecht's Galileo use the same discrepancy in perception without producing comedy, because we know that the forces these characters are combating will lead to their destruction. In comedy, the foreseen resolution will always be the one we desire. Noah's wife is funny because she is fighting against her own salvation.

Much Ado About Nothing is a more complex piece than The Comedy of Errors because in the later play characters must attain not only the audience's knowledge but our

understanding of personalities as well. In Much Ado we are never given information that is denied all the rest of the characters. Instead, as Bertrand Evans point out in Shakespeare's Comedies¹ the plot proceeds toward its happy ending through a complex pattern of secrets or announcements of intentions, actions taken on them, and finally their disclosure. Because almost all of the plans involve deception, at one time or another the audience knows more than each of the characters, and the scale of knowledge is constantly being re-aligned. Evans does an excellent job demonstrating how Shakespeare provides the audience with information denied the characters, and detailing how the hierarchy of knowledge shifts during the course of the drama. My study differs from his in two significant ways. First, although Evans notes how intentions are announced, he is little concerned with the timing of these announcements or with the interval between their declaration and the action that follows. Second, he deals exclusively with the characters' possession of information and ignores their levels of insight and understanding. In his view, the characters are static--Beatrice and Benedick are equally attractive from beginning to end of the play, and Claudio is never any better than a cad who is undeserving of Hero. Similarly, his Don John is a frightening figure, comparable, in fact, to Iago, and

¹(London, 1960). His discussion of Much Ado About Nothing occupies pages 68-86.

the audience's alarm at his plot is unrelieved until
 III. iii. when his confederates are finally apprehended.

I would suggest that just as Shakespeare provides the audience with information which is denied to some of the characters, he also gives us insight into personality to which the characters themselves are blind. A good part of interest in Much Ado is derived from watching the slow progress of adolescents toward maturity --Beatrice and Benedick through the realization of their love for each other, and Claudio by recognizing his own guilt. Suspense is generated not only over when or how the engagements will occur, but how and when the lovers will gain self-awareness. The ending is satisfying because, as the audience has been led to anticipate, both are achieved.

Although Don John does not alter during the course of the drama, his threat is undercut from the beginning by the audience's understanding of his character. When we first encounter Don John, he has not been spurred to active resistance by his defeat. As he himself points out, his ability to act is severely limited, "I am trusted with a muzzle and enfranchised with a clog; therefore I have decreed not to sing in my cage. If I had my mouth, I would bite; if I had my liberty, I would do my liking" (I. iii. 28-32).² It is obvious that Don John

²Citations from Shakespeare's plays are to The Complete Pelican Shakespeare, gen. ed. Alfred Harbage (Baltimore, 1969).

is merely moping here. Compare his speech to the cocky assurance of Shakespeare's dangerous villains. Blank verse is the natural idiom for their declarations of intentions. Iago exclaims, "I have't! It is engend'red! Hell and night/ Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light" (I. iii. 397-98); and Edmund announces, "I grow, I prosper./ Now, gods, stand up for bastards" (I. ii. 21-22). Don John displays no such bravado.

Don John's comparative lack of self-confidence is proved justified in the subsequent action. His first attempt to disrupt the marriage is a notable failure-- Claudio believes all too readily that Don Pedro has wooed Hero for himself, but the misunderstanding is promptly dispelled by the news that Claudio's marriage to Hero has been approved by Leonato. The more successful scheme of having Margaret pose as Hero and receive Borachio's advances is, in fact, proposed by Borachio. Iago and Edmund need no underlings to aid in their machinations, but Don John is a mere accomplice in Borachio's scheme. This is demonstrated when the plan is first proposed and Don John tries gropingly to comprehend the scheme and its ramifications. He queries successively, "How canst thou cross this marriage?" (II. ii. 7), "Show me briefly how" (10), "What is in that to be the death of this marriage?" (17), and "What proof shall I make of that?" (23). By thus dispersing the attributes of the villain--the malice and motivation to Don John, and the cunning to Borachio--

Shakespeare mitigates the concern for the threat posed to the lovers and reinforces our expectations for their reconciliation.

The audience is also encouraged to anticipate a happy ending by the atmosphere of joviality introduced at the beginning of the action. The first scene of Much Ado is firmly rooted in the cheerful ground of comedy. The play opens with the news of the victorious return of Don Pedro with small losses, "few of any sort, and none of name" (5), and the audience learns that both Claudio and Benedick have distinguished themselves in service. We are introduced to the witty dialogue of Beatrice and of Benedick, and witness the first exchange between them. Finally, the audience learns that Claudio has fallen in love with Hero, happily the Governor of Messina's only heir, and Don Pedro promises to intervene on his behalf; we look forward to the night's "revelling" to see their plans carried out. The first scene ends with Don Pedro's optimistic prediction, "And the conclusion is, she shall be thine/ In practice let us put it presently" (298-96). By the end of the first scene the audience can guess how the action will progress--Benedick and Beatrice will realize their love for each other, and Hero and Claudio will marry. We can count on a benevolent prince and a kindly father to assist the young couples toward these goals, but do not know how or when the betrothals will take place. Comic suspense has already

been established.

The stories of the two sets of lovers--the marriage of Claudio and Hero complicated by Don John's plan to thwart it, and the realization of Beatrice's and Benedick's love--are interwoven in such a way that Shakespeare increases suspense by always imposing a period of delay between when we learn what is going to happen and when the action is really taken. In the first act, the Claudio-Hero-Don John plot is given primary attention. In I. 1., we learn from the conversation among Claudio, Benedick, and Don Pedro that Claudio is in love. The first secret plan is also formulated; Don Pedro will woo Hero for Claudio and gain Leonato's consent to the marriage. In the third scene the counter-action is started. Conrade has discovered Claudio's secret, and Borachio, Conrade, and Don John vow that they will try to prevent the marriage.

Action is taken on both plans at the start of the second act. First Don Pedro approaches Hero at the masked ball, then Don John tells Claudio that Don Pedro seeks Hero for himself. These developments find almost immediate resolution in the announcement that Leonato has agreed to Hero marrying Claudio. Once the marriage has been proposed and accepted, the only knowledge that the audience has which is denied any of the characters is that Don John desires to stop the union. On the other hand, our insight is superior to that of almost all the main

characters. Beatrice and Benedick are witty but unattuned to their own emotions, and Claudio is too willing to believe outward appearance and to abandon his love. These faults are a result of callowness not of malice, however, and the audience can look forward to their correction.

The Beatrice-Benedick plot thread is now given prominence by the scheme that is put forth by Don Pedro,

I will in the interim undertake one of Heracles' labors, which is, to bring Signior Benedick and Lady Beatrice into a mountain of affection th'one with th'other. I would fain have it a match, and I doubt not to fashion it if you three will but minister such assistance as I shall give you direction.
(II. i. 324-29)

We also "doubt not" that he will succeed, indeed are confident that he will need less than a Herculean effort, and are eager to hear his plans. Instead, Don John and Borachio intervene. This would be annoying if a signal did not come at once that their meeting has great significance. Don John is resigned after the failure of their first scheme, "It is so. The Count Claudio shall marry the daughter of Leonato." Borachio, however, announces, "Yea, my lord; but I can cross it" (II. ii. 1-3). By the end of this scene, the major plans of both stories have been proposed but action has been taken on neither.

In the last scene of the second act and the first of Act III, the results of Don Pedro's benevolent conspiracy emerge. Benedick enters talking confidently of how he will never love, "One woman is fair, yet I am well; another

is wise, yet I am well; another virtuous, yet I am well; but till all graces be in one woman, one woman shall not come in my grace" (II. iii. 24-27). Benedick's posturing is funny not only because the audience has the superior knowledge that Don Pedro, Claudio, and Leonato are already scheming to make him love, but because we have superior insight into his personality. Benedick and Beatrice have always been partners in wit, and the extremity of their protestations against each other has in fact been a demonstration of their interest, and possibly of their affection. Moreover, Benedick has let it slip that he finds Beatrice much more beautiful than Hero (I. ii. 170-71).

The scene in which Leonato, Pedro, and Claudio deceive Benedick into thinking that Beatrice already loves him is enriched by Benedick's total ignorance of his true emotions, coupled with his supposition that he is in the superior position. He speaks with disdain of Claudio as "Monsieur Love" and believes that he is hiding from the trio and overhearing their secrets. When their conversation is finished, Claudio remarks, "If he do not dote on her upon this, I will never trust my expectations" (II. iii. 194-95). The audience is also certain that their deception has worked, and in this play the audience can always trust its expectations. The surprising speed with which Benedick renounces his former position provides the audience with immediate gratification, "Love

me? Why, it must be requited" (205). The same pattern is followed in a slightly abbreviated form in the subsequent scene with Beatrice. Beatrice too thinks that she is hiding from Hero, Margaret, and Ursula, and her conversion is equally sudden, "Contempt, farewell! and maiden pride adieu!" (III. i. 109). We now wait to see how Benedick and Beatrice will demonstrate their love.

After witnessing the duping of Beatrice, we return to Benedick and discover how he is affected; he refuses to indulge in wit and states anticlimactically, "I have the toothache" (III. ii. 19). We still feel superior to Benedick because although he has come to realize his love for Beatrice, he continues to behave childishly. The scene is interrupted by Don John who is finally carrying out the second conspiracy. Claudio promises action if he is convinced that Hero is untrue, "If I see anything to-night why I should not wed her to-morrow, in the congregation where I should wed, there shall I shame her" (108-09). Don Pedro also announces his intentions, "And as I wooed for thee to obtain her, I will join with thee to disgrace her" (110-11). The audience had witnessed Claudio's gullibility earlier, and can now expect that he will believe Borachio's deception. Lest our fears deepen to an extent inappropriate to comedy, though, the watch apprehends Conrade and Borachio in the next scene, and we know that the true story will come out. The audience knows that, but we also know that the in-

competence of the watch will protract the disclosure.

This is the point where the greatest discrepancy exists between what the audience knows and what the characters do. Some of the secrets we know have been acted upon but not disclosed: John, Conrade, and Borachio have deceived Claudio; Claudio, Pedro, and Leonato have deceived Benedick; and Hero, Ursula, and Margaret have deceived Beatrice. Other intentions have been disclosed but not acted upon: Benedick plans to "requite" Beatrice's love; Beatrice will do likewise; and Claudio will denounce Hero in the church. In addition, we know that eventually the watch will follow up on its arrest of Conrade and Borachio. Although the audience can still be confident of a happy ending, both pleasant and unpleasant events are promised for the immediate future. We thus look forward to the subsequent action with a mixture of eagerness and apprehension.

The next three scenes hold the greatest suspense in the play. First we see Margaret, Hero, and Beatrice preparing for Hero's wedding, which we know will not take place. Then we see Leonato being too impatient to listen to the ramblings of Dogberry, which we know contain vital information. Finally, in the beginning of the church scene, we see Leonato and Benedick ignoring Claudio's responses, which we know are serious. The banter that accompanies each scene--Hero's and Margaret's teasing of Beatrice, Dogberry's chronic malapropism,

and Benedick's and Leonato's jesting in the church--serves to relax the tension and to remind us that this is indeed a comedy in which danger will only threaten.

With Claudio's denunciation of Hero, one great secret is revealed, and our attitude towards the characters changes as we witness their behavior. Claudio, Don Pedro, and Leonato are all lowered in our estimation: Claudio and Don Pedro because of the viciousness of their attacks, and Leonato because he is so ready to believe that his daughter is unchaste. The audience thus has superior understanding and knows that all these characters will have to repent and reform before the end of the play.

Beatrice and Benedick, on the other hand, rise in our esteem when they refuse to doubt Hero and subsequently admit their love for each other. From this point on, Beatrice and Benedick are approaching the same level of awareness as the audience. They do not know that Don John contrived the scene at Hero's window or that they were deceived into declaring their love, but they do realize that Hero is innocent and that they do love, so their ignorance does not affect their actions. In the one major surprise of the play, Beatrice suddenly orders Benedick to "Kill Claudio!" (IV. 1. 285). No matter how lightly this scene is played, Beatrice's exclamation comes as a shocking revelation of the intensity of her feeling. Benedick's subsequent agreement

to challenge Claudio demonstrates the depth of his affection for Beatrice. The scene is important in precluding the audience from taking a one-sided view of these lovers and finding them attractive but essentially shallow people. Sharing for the first time a secret with Beatrice and Benedick, consecrates our new response.

After the church scene, the central action of the play is the movement toward the disclosure of the secrets and toward the characters' comprehension of their personalities which the audience already possesses. We desire for the weddings to take place and for the characters to recognize their mistakes, and suspense is heightened by the excruciatingly slow pace at which the action progresses toward these conclusions. The Sexton is finally able to discover the significance of the arrest of Borachio and Conrade, and announces that he will go to Leonato's. In the following scene, Leonato is indeed present but instead of the watch entering with their disclosure, Don Pedro and Claudio appear. A quarrel ensues which accomplishes little except perhaps, with Leonato's realization that he should not have doubted Hero, a small step is taken toward the characters achieving understanding. In the subsequent exchange with Benedick, Claudio and Don Pedro are unable to notice the maturation of Benedick and refuse to take him seriously. This lowers our opinion of them still further. The friar had hoped that the news of Hero's death would bring a

reformation in Claudio's character, but apparently he is unaffected. He continues to indulge in the same lame joking even in the face of Benedick's forthright, "You are a villain. I jest not" (V. 1. 143). We realize that Claudio will have to make amends before his marriage with Hero can be carried out.

At the end of the scene, Leonato finally learns the truth of Hero's slander from the Sexton, and Don Pedro and Claudio hear Borachio's confession. Leonato points the course of the following action by declaring that Don Pedro and Claudio are to spend the night in mourning for Hero, and the next day Claudio will be wed to the daughter of Leonato's brother. The final deception has been perpetrated.

Before we see Don Pedro and Claudio at the grave, the Beatrice-Benedick plot line again intervenes. Benedick reports to Beatrice that he has challenged Claudio, and they reiterate their love. Benedick in a happy mixture of tenderness and bawdy humor declares, "I will live in thy heart, die in thy lap, and be buried in thy eyes; and moreover, I will go with thee to thy uncle's" (V. ii. 90-92).

Claudio and Don Pedro are the only ones left who do not share the audience's insight, and the atonement scene proves they are ready to have the final secret revealed. It is important that this episode be played as one of true repentance, not as an unpleasant experience

Claudio agrees to undergo in order to procure a new wife. As Alexander Leggatt states,

Instead of being set against an unsympathetic background of realism, the Claudio story is allowed to expand its range of reference in a way that strengthens our acceptance of it. In the scene at Hero's tomb, external forms--the music, the ceremony, the mourning poem--are made to carry the weight of Claudio's grief. It is the most formal scene in the play, and if it is well staged . . . it may lead us to feel that formal expressions of feeling have their own kind of value.³

We must accept Claudio as finally reaching the audience's understanding in order to find the reconciliation with Hero satisfying. By the end of this scene, all the characters have gained as much comprehension as they are capable of absorbing. The audience's expectations for one part of the drama have been fulfilled and we look forward to the anticipated action also being completed.

In the last scene, all the disclosures are made and the couples are betrothed. Characteristically, the play ends with final statements of intended actions; the friar will explain all, the couples will dance and then be married. The last words are Benedick's, who declares, speaking of Don John, "Think not on him till to-morrow. I'll devise thee brave punishments for him. Strike up, pipers!" (V. iv. 125-26).

As we have seen, Shakespeare is completely straightforward with his audience in Much Ado About Nothing. Not

³Shakespeare's Comedy of Love (London, 1974), p. 165.

only are the initial anticipations for character development and events proved justified, but the audience is never surprised by what takes place during the course of the drama. We are informed of what all the characters plan to do and they never deviate from their announced intentions. Shakespeare heightens suspense by consistently imposing an interval between the announcement of these intentions and the action taken upon them. During these intervals we do not worry about what is going to happen, but we do wonder when the event will occur and what reaction it will provoke.

Suspense is also generated over when characters will attain the audience's level of understanding. In the first half of the play, we are interested in watching Beatrice and Benedick slowly become aware of their own emotions. The only surprise of the play takes place when Beatrice orders Benedick to kill Claudio and the audience realizes that its attitude toward her has not kept pace with her developing personality. After the church scene we wonder when Claudio, Don Pedro and Leonardo will realize their guilt in mistrusting Hero and will repent of their hastiness. The drama ends when the characters have gained both the knowledge and the insight of the audience.

Near the beginning of Much Ado, the audience can guess that the young lovers eventually will correct their faults and be happily united. As in The Birds,

at the end of Shakespeare's play the audience feels that it has performed its role effectively and is pleased to find its expectations confirmed. The earlier play also insisted upon the mastery of the playwright and of the protagonist. While Shakespeare does not call attention to his management of scenes, and no character is able consistently to manipulate events to his advantage like Peisthetaerus, Much Ado still asserts the comic idea of the power of man precisely because of all the characters' ability to carry out their plans. Shakespeare's tragedies do not make this assertion. In Othello, Iago is as forthright as Borachio in telling the audience what he is going to do and in accomplishing it, but Othello cannot take us into his confidence because he does not know how he is going to act. Similarly, in King Lear the audience learns of the actions of Edmund, Regan, and Goneril before they take place, but Lear and Gloucester cannot plan because they are not able to exercise command over what befalls them. In Much Ado it is significant that all intentions, from Don John's to slander Hero to Dogberry's to be "writ down an ass" are both declared and fulfilled.

A major reason why Shakespeare's "problem plays" disquiet is that they call into question comedy's theme of the power of man. The audience frequently finds its anticipations frustrated, and the characters are no longer assured that they can formulate plans and carry

them out. Luck plays a disturbingly large role in achieving the final reconciliation.

All's Well that Ends Well is typical of these works. Instead of opening with triumphant return from battle, evidence of man's prowess, All's Well starts with characters in mourning for recent deaths, demonstrations of man's incapacity to change his destiny. Exhilaration is replaced by nostalgia, and the young, spirited characters are counterbalanced by the aged and diseased. Even Lavatch, the clown, jokes more often about death and damnation than about youth and fertility. In Much Ado, Messina is a lively world where all the characters make plans and vie for position to initiate action; Marseilles and Rossillion are marked by a general listlessness.

The undermining of the power of man is most obvious in the older characters. Don John, Don Pedro, and Leonato are as active and assertive as the young lovers; in All's Well an entire generation has atrophied. On the lowest level of society, Lavatch not only fails to amuse the audience, but the other characters as well. Parolles speaks well of him, but he does so equivocally, "A good knave, i'faith, and well fed" (II. iv. 36). The Countess apologizes for his presence (IV. v. 60), and his jests are generally ignored. His one really fine speech (IV. v. 44-51) is badly received and Lafew declares, "Go thy ways; I begin to be awearry

of thee" (52). The scene devoted to his "bountiful answer that fits all questions" (II. ii) serves no purpose except to point up his incompetence, and is immediately followed by a scene of successful jesting by Parolles. The younger Parolles has in fact usurped Lavatch's role as clown.

Lafew is almost as ineffectual as Lavatch. He is supposed to counsel Bertram in court but is unable even to convince him of Parolles's turpitude, let alone govern his behavior. He does not find comfort in age, but instead foolishly longs for youth so that he could solicit Helena's love (II. iii. 58-60; 77-78). Since he feels out of the competition, he does not interfere with the action and can only resort to jealous comments on the courtiers' worthlessness and what he interprets to be their coldness to Helena. Lafew hardly demonstrates age graced by wisdom.

The Countess does not desire to be young again, but her more realistic hopes for her son are also unfulfilled. She hopes that Bertram will behave well in court and he defies the king; she hopes that he will love Helena and he spurns her. She is confined to Rossillion so that to affect events, she must write to the court. Her first letter is to Helena and she gives Lavatch instructions:

To your business: give Helen this,
And urge her to a present answer back.
Commend me to my kinsmen and my son.
This is not much.

(II. ii. 57-60)

We are so obviously alerted to pay attention to the letter that we expect some action to result from it. Instead, we hear from Helena that "My mother greets me kindly" (II. iv. 1). That is all: we do not see Lavatch with Bertram, nor does Helena send a reply back to Rossillion.

When the Countess hears that Bertram has deserted Helena, she writes him "To tell him that his sword can never win/ The honor that he loses" (III. ii. 91-92). That letter is no sooner dispatched than she learns of Helena's pilgrimage, and she urges her steward to write again in stronger language (III. iv. 29-35). Neither letter has an appreciable effect on Bertram's conduct. After her failure to produce a happy marriage between Helena and her son, the Countess retires from the action. She laments Helena's death, bemoans that Parolles was ever in her service, and anticipates her own demise. In the final scene she is almost completely silent.

Even the king is suffering from the general impotence of the old. In affairs of state, he is content to let matters fall out as they may; he will not intervene in the Florentine-Siennese war, and the courtiers may fight on either side or refrain, as they see fit. His passivity is not confined to the body politic but extends to his own health as well. At the outset of the play, he has given up all attempt to find a cure for his disease, and he laments his present situation without making any attempt to improve it. His first two speeches

to Bertram herald this mood. He fondly recalls his youth with Bertram's father, and then wishes that he had followed his friend to the grave.

Even though the king's spirits rise after Helena's miraculous cure, his authority is still not fully restored. After he has coerced Bertram into agreeing to marry Helena, he orders, "Take her by the hand,/ And tell her she is thine" (II. iii. 172-73), to which Bertram responds, "I take her hand" (176). His most important prohibition, that Bertram stay away from the Florentine war, is summarily violated. In the last scene, Diana is outright cheeky to him saying, "By Jove, if ever I knew man, 'twas you" (284), and the orchestration of events is clearly Helena's and not the king's. Early in the play Helena says that it is a pity "That wishing well had not a body in't/ Which might be felt" (I. ii. 175-76). In context, her lines have bawdy overtones, but they could also be the catchwords for the older generation in All's Well. Lafew, the Countess of Rossillion, and the king all mean well, but they are powerless to make their intentions felt.

With one set of characters essentially unable to plan or to make an impact on events and thus to influence the audience's expectations, the burden of initiating action and arousing suspense falls upon the trio of Helena, Parolles, and Bertram. Once again, near the beginning of the play, the audience can guess what

the final outcome of the action will be--Helena will eventually win Bertram--but is unsure of how or when it will occur.

True comic suspense is never established, however, because Shakespeare from the outset weakens the audience's desire for the conclusion. Our uneasiness about the reversal of the courtship roles is made stronger by the disturbing elements of Helena's personality. Certainly the other characters speak well of her, and the audience sympathizes with her love for a person of higher position, but her single-minded pursuit of her objective seems callous. When Lafew recommends that she live up to the reputation of her father, she remarks in an aside:

O, were that all! I think not on my father,
And these great tears grace his remembrance more
Than those I shed for him. What was he like?
I have forgot him.

(I. 1. 75-78)

The harshness of the last two lines is especially disconcerting.

Helena is also willing to deceive even friendly characters in order to attain her goal. When she voices her desire to go to Paris, she speaks at length of the value of the remedy she will apply to the king before being forced by the Countess to confess her true motives:

My lord your son made me to think of this;
Else Paris, and the medicine, and the king
Had from the conversation of my thoughts
Happily been absent then.

(I. 111. 224-27)

We begin to suspect our heroine of hypocrisy. But unlike our expectations for Beatrice and Benedick, we cannot anticipate that Helena's fault will be corrected during the course of the drama. We have no more insight into her personality than she has: she simply does not draw the same moral judgment from her conduct that the audience does. Our misgivings about the heroine undermine our eagerness to see her triumph.

When Helena acts upon her plan in the court scene, the uneasiness is temporarily placed in the background. We are not privy to her thoughts but do admire her courage and her diplomacy in changing the king's mind without appearing impudent. The audience hopes that she will succeed with her cure, and her self-confidence assures us that she will, but we also know that all other doctors have failed and we wonder how she will perform the restoration. The audience is also pleased by the prospect of the king's cure, which Shakespeare delays by imposing the scene between Lavatch and the Countess. The king's arrival is followed immediately by Helena's choice of her husband. Suspense is again increased by delay. When after addressing several other lords, Helena finally selects Bertram--as we knew she would--we are greeted by the first important surprise of the play: Bertram refuses. He begs:

My wife, my liege? I shall beseech your highness,
In such a business give me leave to use
The help of mine own eyes.

(II. iii. 105-07)

In fact he denies her with increasing insolence. In response to the king's statement, "Thou know'st she has raised me from my sickly bed," he replies:

But follows it, my lord, to bring me down,
Must I answer for your raising? I know her well;
She had her breeding at my father's charge.
A poor physician's daughter my wife? Disdain
Rather corrupt me ever!

(111-15)

Bertram may be unaware of it, but disdain has already corrupted him. Our estimation of Helena must rise when she demurely refuses to press her suit saying simply, "That you are well restored, my lord, I'm glad./ Let the rest go" (146-47). But the king insists, and Bertram is married against his will. Helena's plan of winning his love has failed.

Claudio had similarly misjudged Hero, however, and we can anticipate that in the ensuing action Bertram will gain a true estimate of Helena's value. Instead, Bertram consistently slips in our esteem as our attention is centered on his attempts to evade his wife. Until the court scene, the audience's desire for Helena's union with Bertram was lowered by our apprehensions about her unswerving pursuit, now we increasingly wonder if her quarry is worth the effort. First, Bertram tells Parolles that he will send Helena home and go to war. In the manner of Much Ado, suspense is heightened by the intervention of two short scenes between Bertram's announcement and his encounter with Helena. When we do see Bertram

following through on his plan he behaves reprehensibly. He refuses to kiss Helena but is too cowardly to tell her his true feelings. Rather than admit that he is running off to Florence, Bertram lies and says that he will join her in Rossillion in two days. When Parolles closes the scene with "Bravely, coragio!" we feel that he may be speaking ironically.

In the following scene the results of Bertram's action are witnessed. The Countess reads his self-pitying letter signed "your unfortunate son" and Helena enters with his letter rejecting her, "When thou canst get the ring upon my finger which never shall come off and show me a child begotten of thy body that I am father to, then call me husband; but in such a 'then' I write a 'never' " (III. iii. 56-59). We have seen Helena perform the miraculous before, however, in curing the king, and we expect her to announce her determination to fulfill Bertram's conditions once the Countess is out of hearing. Instead, we are surprised by her speech announcing her intention to steal away; she subsequently expands her plans in a letter to the Countess, saying that she will become a pilgrim to St. Jaques. At this point our sympathy for Helena has been regained, and our opinion of Bertram has fallen to a new low for disdaining such a wife. The audience possesses no knowledge that has been denied the characters, and like them we can see no way out of the muddle that has been created.

The scene now shifts to Florence where we hear of Bertam's military victories but also of his assault on the virtue of Diana. Our interest has just been aroused in this new enterprise of Bertram's when we are surprised by the entrance of Helena. Although there are other pilgrims staying with the widow in Florence, Helena's appearance there presents the audience with a dilemma. Either she has lied to the Countess, misled the audience, and as Bertrand Evans puts it, "her pilgrimage was never meant for Jaques, but for Priapus,"⁴ and the desire to see her happily wed suffers. Or, happenstance has taken over management of events: man cannot control his destiny and the audience cannot trust its expectations. In either case comic suspense is further diminished.

Our doubts are left unresolved when we return to Bertram and hear of the lords' plan to expose Parolles. We shift again to Helena and discover her plot to use Diana to accomplish the task set for her by Bertram. Our expectations have been set, and suspense is built in the subsequent action of the interweaving of the two plots. Like the suspense about Helena's over-all project of winning Bertram's love, the suspense accompanying her plot to deceive him into her bed is not truly comic. We are not especially looking forward to its fruition: our interest is less than in the Parolles

⁴p. 157.

episode because we know from the beginning that we are not going to witness its climax, and the scheme itself is especially unsavory. Helena emphasizes the mercenary benefits that it will produce for the widow. She states, "Take this purse of gold,/ And let me buy your friendly help thus far" (III. vii. 14-15), then adds, "To marry her, I'll add three thousand crowns/ To what is passed already" (35-36). This final argument convinces the widow. Helena herself seems unsure of the morality of the plan, saying:

Let us assay our plot, which if it speed,
Is wicked meaning in a lawful deed,
And lawful meaning in a lawful deed,
Where both not sin, and yet a sinful fact.
But let's about it.

(44-48)

Expediency fails to overcome the audience's moral doubts so easily, and our satisfaction at anticipating a happy ending evaporates since neither of the major characters please.

In the subsequent action, fortunately greater attention is given to the plot against Parolles. Evans has pointed out how our superior knowledge contributes to the enjoyment of the scene in which he is exposed. The manner in which he is exposed also adds to our delight--the witty Parolles who thought himself the master of words is taken in by the improvised gibberish of the lords. His cowardice is in such excess and his statements are so extreme that the audience must agree with the lord who says, "I begin to love him for this" (IV. iii. 246).

Our feeling of superiority to Parolles remains but our tolerance increases, and we are glad that he is undaunted in spite of his experience. Parolles is perhaps the only character in All's Well who successfully demonstrates comedy's premise that man can retain his personality through the flux of experience.

The lords expose Parolles for Bertram's benefit, and Shakespeare could have used the scene to show Bertram realizing that he has been misled and repenting of his own misconduct. A contrite Bertam could have rekindled some of the audience's desire for his reconciliation with Helena. But Bertram apparently does not profit from the lesson; rather than re-examining his own behavior, he is content to berate Parolles as a cat.

All the intrigues have now been carried out, and the audience can anticipate a speedy resolution to the action. Instead, there are fortuitous complications, and our expectations are constantly being upset. Helena does set off after Bertram, but she indicates that her reconciliation will not be easily achieved. She tells her confederate:

You, Diana
Under my poor instructions, yet must suffer
Something in my behalf.

(IV. iv. 26-28)

For the first time, she fails to let the audience know what her new plan is.

In the next scene, Lafew and the Countess are exchanging predictable praises of Helena and voicing

general nostalgia for the good old days, when Lafew surprises us by suddenly announcing that he has a daughter who the king plans to marry to Bertram. Suspense builds as we await Helena's arrival from Marseilles before Bertram's new marriage. In the last scene, however, we are bombarded with such a series of surprises that Helena is almost forgotten. First Bertram states that he rejected Helena because he was already in love with Lafew's daughter. Then it is discovered that Bertram has a ring that the king gave to Helena. It is the first the audience has heard of this ring, but it apparently was of such great importance to Helena that the king suspects that Bertram must have murdered her to obtain it. Finally Diana Capilet arrives, but instead of explaining the complications, she introduces new ones by claiming Bertram as her husband. We are also surprised by Bertram's conduct; he is worse than ever as he lies and slanders Diana to save himself. When Helena at last intervenes, Bertram's response seems deliberately ambiguous. After Helena states, "'Tis but the shadow of a wife you see,/ The name and not the thing" Bertram responds, "Both, both; O pardon!" (V. iii. 304-05). If the action stopped there, the simplicity of Bertram's statement could be dramatically effective. But when Helena asks, "Will you be mine, now you are doubly won?" Bertram answers conditionally and addresses not her but the king, "If she, my liege, can make me know this clearly/ I'll love her

dearly--ever, ever dearly" (312-13).

Now that all of Helena's plans have succeeded, we still feel little sense of pleasure. Since Bertram's reformation is still in doubt, Helena's long, morally questionable pursuit is ill-rewarded. Furthermore, the king is dangerously close to setting the whole unhappy process in motion again by declaring in his final speech that he will now let Diana choose a husband. No one has profited from the experience.

All's Well That Ends Well may be a more "realistic" play than Much Ado in its ambiguous ending and its questioning of man's control over events, but that also makes it less satisfying as a comedy. Helena is the only character who displays any ability to manipulate affairs to her advantage and she is aided in large part by good luck. Moreover, she is not a true comic heroine since she does not have the audience's unequivocal support. Unlike Aristophanes in The Birds, Shakespeare does not insist upon his own mastery--if the audience does become cognizant of his role as playwright, it is in Act V when we wonder who is confused, him or us? Most important, the audience must feel frustrated in its role of responding to the action and predicting new events. In Much Ado About Nothing, Claudio said of Benedick, "If he do not dote on her upon this I will never trust my expectations" (II. iii. 194-95) and Benedick was promptly shown to be in love. In All's Well,

on the other hand, Helena states, "Oft expectation fails" (II. i. 142) and in this play our expectations are indeed frequently overturned.

Comic suspense is never established in the play: we can guess the final outcome but are not especially eager to see it take place. The audience is told that "all will be well," but by the end of the play we do not know what that "well" would be. The final reconciliation between Bertram and Helena is what was anticipated, but we have so little sympathy for the characters by then that the audience feels no particular gratification. Suspense thus works to undercut rather than to reinforce the comic elements in All's Well. The sympathetic characters, the playwright, and the audience all display little mastery of events, and the audience must experience more discomfort at the end of the play than delight.

The Winter's Tale manages both to demonstrate man's irrationality and capacity for evil, and once again to assert human mastery of experience. The first part of The Winter's Tale isn't true comedy at all. In the opening acts Shakespeare presents the audience with such momentous action that only by being carefully distanced from the characters are we prevented from viewing the danger through their eyes, and experiencing uneasiness inappropriate in a comedy. The language of the first scene is striking for its artifice. Camillo's prose is laden with elaborate conceits,

They were trained together in their childhoods, and there rooted betwixt them then such an affection which cannot choose but branch now. Since their more mature dignities and royal necessities made separation of their society, their encounters, though not personal, have been royally attorneyed with interchange of gifts, letters, loving embassies; that they have seemed to be together, though absent; shook hands, as over a vast; and embraced, as it were, from the ends of opposed winds.

(I. 1. 20-28)

In the theater the audience may not quite understand what Camillo is saying but his words are obviously ambivalent--we are not sure whether the emphasis is on separation or on union.

Formality remains unbroken with Polixenes's first words:

Nine changes of the wat'ry star hath been
The shepherd's note since we have left our throne
Without a burthen.

(I. 11. 1-3)

Leontes's lines, though simpler are no less conventional. Hermione is the only one, in fact, who initially speaks with any warmth, and by then the structure of the scene is so stylized that our engagement with her personality is diminished. After this impersonal introduction, Leontes's jealousy comes as a double shock--not only is it completely unmotivated, but the audience is unprepared for statement of any deep emotion.⁵ The language itself is surprising:

⁵For a contrary view, see William Matchett, "Some Dramatic Techniques in The Winter's Tale, ShS, 23 (1969), 93-107. He states that "far from feeling that Leontes is too rapidly jealous, we should feel that he has been very slow about it" (p. 97). According to Matchett, our surprise comes when the oracle declares Hermione innocent.

But to be paddling palms and pinching fingers,
 As they now are, and making practiced smiles
 As in a looking-glass, and then to sigh, as 'twere
 The mort o'the deer---O, that is entertainment
 My bosom likes not, nor my brows. Mamillius
 Art thou my boy?

(I. ii. 115-20)

The imagery becomes even more forceful as Leontes ponders further his wife's supposed adultery:

And many a man there is, even at this present,
 Now while I speak this, holds his wife by th'arm,
 That little thinks she has been sluiced in's absence
 And his pond fished by his next neighbor, by
 Sir Smile, his neighbor.

(191-95)

The intensity of Leontes's feeling is so great and is generated by so little provocation that the element of suspense is largely removed. The audience is not engaged with Leontes so that little concern is generated over when he will realize his mistake or what effect that insight will have upon him. Instead, we watch his actions from the outside, viewing him with awe and amazement, perhaps, but without involvement.

The feeling of detachment is strengthened by his subsequent irrational behavior. When Camillo interrupts Leontes's musing, Leontes speaks to him at first with affection and respect (244-48), but then suddenly turns on him viciously:

You lie, you lie.
 I say thou liest, Camillo, and I hate thee,
 Pronounce thee a gross lout, a mindless slave,
 Or else a hovering temporizer.

(298-301)

Leontes's temper, it is now clear, may explode in any direction.

The audience knows that the threat to Hermione is immediate, and in II. 1. suspense builds as Hermione plays with Mamillius and discusses her pregnancy with her ladies. The scene is similar to III. iv. in Much Ado About Nothing where Hero is preparing for her wedding, but suspense there was undercut by the playful banter and the knowledge that Borachio had been apprehended. Here the tension is alleviated only by our lack of complete engagement with the characters. Mamillius is less than a delight, as even his mother admits, and although Hermione is attractive, we have not seen enough of her to become involved with her emotions. When Leontes enters, we discover that his passion has led him to surprising new suspicions, "Camillo was his help in this; his pander./ There is a plot against my life, my crown" (II. 1. 46-47). Hermione reacts with courage to his outburst, but she openly forbids too much sympathy, telling her maids, "Do not weep, good fools;/ There is no cause" (118-19).

After Hermione has been imprisoned, it is a relief to hear that Leontes has sent to Delphi to have the oracle confirm his suspicion, and the closing lines of the scene set a different tone from the one experienced before. Leontes announces that Hermione will be tried, "We are to speak in public, for this business/ Will raise us all." Antigonus confides, "To laughter, as I take it,/ If the good truth were known" (197-99). Laughter had not been even a possibility until now.

At this point danger has threatened more closely than during any of Shakespeare's comedies, but the audience is not overly concerned because we can still have confidence in the oracle's judgment. The suspense does not cause dread because we are sure of Hermione's vindication. It is not "comic suspense" either, however, because the outcome we anticipate will not be a positive new action but a mere deflection of harm.

In the intervening scene, comedy is indeed introduced with Paulina's shrewishness.⁶ She has told Emilia previously:

If I prove honey-mouthed, let my tongue blister
And never to my red-looking anger be
The trumpet any more.

(II. iii. 33-35)

In the confrontation with Leontes she lives up to her promise and apparently to her reputation as well, since Leontes whines to Antigonus, "I charged thee that she should not come about me. I knew she would" (II. iii. 43-44). Although Leontes consistently berates Antigonus for not controlling Paulina, he takes no action to remove her either, and she leaves only when she is ready. For the first time a sympathetic character has at least attempted to influence events.

After Paulina's departure, Leontes orders Antigonus to abandon his daughter in some remote place, and

⁶This point is made by Joan Hartwig, "The Tragicomic Perspective of The Winter's Tale," ELH, 37 (1970), 12-36.

the audience must fear for the child while still holding on to some hope that she will be spared. Leontes had asked, "What will you adventure/ To save this brat's life?" (161-62), and Antigonus had introduced a small degree of optimism:

Some powerful spirit instruct the kites and ravens
To be thy nurses. Wolves and bears, they say,
Casting their savageness aside, have done
Like offices of pity.

(185-88)

To reinforce the audience's expectation that all will end well, news arrives that Cleomenes and Dion have returned from Delphi and are hastening to the court.

In the trial scene we worry for Hermione but suspense is once again mitigated by the formality of the occasion and by Hermione's own attitude. She appeals to the audience's sense of justice, not to our sympathy and speaks almost allegorically:⁷

if powers divine
Behold our human actions, as they do,
I doubt not then but innocence shall make
False accusation blush and tyranny
Tremble at patience.

(III. ii. 27-31)

Her confidence that she will be exonerated is reassuring, and the audience knows throughout the trial that the messengers will soon arrive with Apollo's oracle. When the officer reads the pronouncement we are relieved, "Hermione is chaste, Polixenes blameless, Camillo a true

⁷See Richard Studing's "Spectacle and Masque in The Winter's Tale," EM, 21 (1970), 55-80.

subject, Leontes a jealous tyrant, his innocent babe truly begotten; and the king shall live without an heir if that which is lost be not found" (III. ii. 131-34). The last phrase hints that the daughter will indeed be saved. Our pleasant speculations are suddenly jarred, however, by Leontes's announcement, "There is no truth at all i'th'oracle./ The session shall proceed. This is mere falsehood" (138-39).⁸ We have no time to recover from the shock of this statement, for with fearful swiftness, the audience is faced with the news of Mamillius's death, Leontes's repentance, and then Hermione's apparent death. The surprise of these events and their sheer rapidity serve to dull the audience's reaction. The action up to this point is certainly far from comic. Despite Paulina's effort, none of the "good" characters has shown any ability to control events. The audience also feels no sense of mastery: we find ourselves in a world where what happens is completely unpredictable and nothing can be anticipated. Comic suspense, moreover, is impossible since we lack any assurance of a happy ending.

The tone changes at the end of the third act with Antigonus's "exit pursued by a bear." As critics have noted, this chase scene would have to be funny.⁹ The

⁸Evans states the Leontes's rejection of the oracle is no surprise because it is never indicated that he would trust it (p. 295). This flies in the face not only of what Leontes says, but of what all his attendants anticipate.

⁹See, for example, Matchett; also Nevill Coghill, "Six Points of Stage-craft in The Winter's Tale," ShS. 11 (1958), 31-41.

"clown's" recital of the events increases the humor, as he rushes to include all of the facts while struggling to keep the story in the proper order. We are relieved that Perdita has been found, and the shepherd closes the scene with the statement, "'Tis a lucky day, boy, and we'll do good deeds on't" (III. iii. 127-28). The audience is viewing the action from a god-like perspective; unable to see the world through the eyes of any of the characters, we are aware of the existence of designs beyond their actions. Even though Antigonus, an honorable and likeable character, has just been killed, we can realize that for the shepherd all the misfortunes we have just witnessed accrue to his benefit, and for him it is indeed a lucky day.

This recognition is reinforced by the figure of Time who tells the audience, "I, that please some, try all, both joy and terror/ Of good and bad, that makes and unfolds error." Human destinies are governed by more than individual wills. Time turns his glass and announces that attention will now be directed to Florizel and Perdita.¹⁰ While previously the audience had been watching a world disintegrate, we will now witness one mend.

The results of Leontes's jealousy before had been so grave that the audience had to be sheltered from in-

¹⁰For a fine discussion of the role of time in the play, see Inga-Stina Ewbank, "The Triumph of Time in The Winter's Tale," REL, 5 (1964), 83-100.

volvement with the characters in order not to view their situation as tragic. Anxiety was also alleviated by the mistaken assumption that Leontes would abide by the pronouncement of the oracle and rediscover his love for Hermione. In Act IV the threats are much less serious, our affections can be more actively engaged, and true comic suspense can be established. Our assurance that Perdita's and Florizel's love will triumph and that eventually Perdita will be reunited with her father generates the appropriate suspense: the audience looks forward to the conclusion without being able to foresee how or when it will take place.

The first scene gives the audience an overview of the subsequent action. We hear that Florizel is in love (we suspect with Perdita), and that Polixenes is displeased. We anticipate immediate action after Camillo and Polixenes formulate plans to visit the shepherd in disguise. Autolycus enters singing, and we are assured that we are once again firmly grounded in comedy. Autolycus harkens back to Sir Toby in Twelfth Night; both are filchers, but both are more amusing than malevolent. After what the audience has witnessed in the previous three acts, pilfering seems an unimportant trespass. In Autolycus's beguiling of the young shepherd, we are able to laugh at his parody of death, even the specific death of Antigonus: "I fear, sir, my shoulder-blade is out" (IV. iii. 71). We can feel confident that this time our expectations

for a happy ending will not be disappointed.

This impression is underscored in the sheep-shearing episode, when we are greeted by characters who are young and in love, and are celebrating spring with songs and dances. Perdita instantly charms--not only is she gracious and affectionate, she also has a mind of her own and countenances no illusions about love and romance. Florizel, as is usual in Shakespeare's comedies, is somewhat less appealing than his mistress, but his love is honest and healthy. Unlike Claudio, Bertram, or even Orlando in As You Like It, he seems worthy of the woman's affection.

Comic suspense is heightened by the immediate threat to the happiness of Perdita and Florizel. The audience is assured by the attitude of the lovers themselves and by the ambience of their surroundings that their love will triumph, but at the same time we know that Polixenes will interrupt the proceedings and are concerned for them. When Polixenes does in fact erupt in rage, his anger is in no way comparable to Leontes's jealousy. Polixenes's initial statements are dire enough: he tells the old shepherd, "I am sorry that by hanging thee I can/ But shorten thy life one week" (IV. iv. 414-15), and says to Perdita, "I'll have thy beauty scratched with briars, and made/ More homely than thy state" (418-19). He quickly retracts these threats, however, saying that both the shepherd and Perdita will be spared

if they no longer tempt Florizel. He stalks off more in a pet than in the heady delirium of Leontes. Lest the audience over-react to Polixenes's outburst, Perdita establishes the correct perspective saying:

I was not much afeard; for once or twice
I was about to speak and tell him plainly
The selfsame sun that shines upon his court
Hides not his visage from our cottage but
Looks on alike.

(435-39)

Florizel echoes her feeling, "I am sorry, not afeard, delayed,/ But nothing altered" (456-57). The only one who takes Polixenes's words seriously is the old shepherd. Polixenes indeed, poses the menace proper to comedy. We know that he will be unable to sever the lovers--their attachment is too deep--and besides if the shepherd is frightened enough the story of Perdita's discovery will come out; he does, however, pose a real obstacle to their immediate happiness.

Camillo formulates a plan for the lovers' escape to Sicily, then immediately announces to the audience that he will inform Polixenes of their flight. Polixenes's opposition has not been overcome, its effects have merely been delayed. To allay any apprehensions of the audience, in the next scene Autolycus persuades the shepherd and his son to acquaint Polixenes with how Perdita was discovered. He closes the act with the statement, "To him will I present them; there may be matter in it" (IV. iv. 824). Our expectations have now been framed for what will follow. We know that Perdita and Florizel will be welcomed by

Leontes and that Perdita will be discovered to be Leontes's daughter so that Polixenes's hostility to their marriage will dissolve.

Now we see Leontes and are made aware by his continued contrition that he is worthy of the joy we know awaits him. Leontes, it is made clear, is without an heir, and the audience realizes that the discovery of Perdita will benefit the community as well. The reunion of Florizel, Perdita, Leontes, and Polixenes would have been an adequate resolution to the drama, but it is described by secondary characters so our expectations are aroused for an even finer climax. We know that the pilgrimage to Paulina's house will produce something miraculous and from the description of Hermione's statue the audience may even guess what it might be, but we cannot be sure. John Lawlor notes, "The crowning surprise of the romance, if it is not to be a mere coup de théâtre, must come as fulfillment of a happiness the audience has begun to hope for in despite of probability."¹¹ This is precisely what Shakespeare achieves in the final scene. Here comic suspense is carried further than ever before in Shakespearean comedy--the audience is confident that something wonderful is going to occur, and we hope we know what it is. Our doubts are strong enough, however, to keep us spellbound until the statue moves.

¹¹"Pandosto and the Nature of Dramatic Romance," PQ, 41 (1962), p. 112.

In this play, as in All's Well That Ends Well, Shakespeare does not reject the harsher view of life, and indeed the deaths of Mamillius and Antigonus are irreversible. But beyond the surprises and vicissitudes of the human will, there is a force that, given time and patience, will re-establish order. Suspense results both from the recognition of such a force and from the disparity between its pace and that of human activity.

Despite the shocking action of the first half of the play, The Winter's Tale still cleaves to the comic theme of the power of man. In the mature comedies such as Much Ado About Nothing, this power is shown in all of the characters' capacity to formulate and execute plans, and in the audience's ability to predict events. Suspense is generated by the delay between the announcements of intentions and the undertaking of action, and also by the slow pace at which the play progresses towards its happy ending. One of the difficulties with the "problem plays" is that by the conclusion, none of the main characters charms and the audience is deprived of the happy ending. In All's Well our doubts and anxious anticipations concerning the action are not relieved by the assurance that Bertram, like Claudio, will be reformed. There is suspense in the play, but it is not "comic suspense": the ending is anticipated, but it is not especially desired. The power of man is also not asserted in this play: the audience's expectations are frequently

frustrated, and the only character who can control her experience at all is Helena, from whom the audience must withhold complete support.

The Winter's Tale again demonstrates man's control over circumstance, but in a different manner than either Much Ado or The Birds. In the first part of the play, both the characters and the audience are surprised by what occurs and no one feels master of events. When the action changes to Bohemia, the audience has increasing reassurance that our expectations are correct and the characters once again are able to overcome threats to their happiness. The final scenes make a bold affirmation of human power. Paulina announces, "It is required/ You do awake your faith" (94-95), and when both characters and audience fulfill her demand--when both long for the statue to move and believe that it is possible--a live Hermione results. Cloudcuckooland in Aristophanes's The Birds was established by the assertion of a boundless human will: in The Winter's Tale the tempering of this will with understanding and compassion achieves as awesome an accomplishment.

CHAPTER IV

VOLPONE AND BARTHOLOMEW FAIR:
THE PREDICTABILITY OF VICE AND FOLLY

Comic suspense is even more closely aligned with the theme of the power of man in Jonson's Volpone and Bartholomew Fair than in the comedies previously discussed. In Jonson's plays knowledge equals power: the characters are unchanging and those who can predict behavior can control events. Vice and folly circumscribe a character's actions, making him prey to circumstance and to others who can exploit his weakness. Eventually all the characters experience disappointment, but it is a failure not shared by the audience which alone has the insight to perceive all the characters' failings, and thus the ability to correctly anticipate their behavior.

In The Birds, events may surprise the audience, but we can predict the outcome of the episodes because of the consistency of characterization: we know that Peis-thetaerus will be able to overcome all challengers. In Much Ado, the audience is kept informed of what is going to happen by the interweaving of scenes so that we learn of each new plan as it is formulated. The movement toward the anticipated conclusion in Volpone appears even more relentless since the audience both overhears all the projects and is given insight to foretell the character's reactions.

Mosca and Volpone in Jonson's play fill the role of Peisthetaerus, the clever knave, and Voltore, Corbaccio, Corvino, and Lady Would-Be are the buffoons and impostors who are victimized.¹ As in Aristophanes's play, both groups are self-enclosed from the beginning, and there is no suspense over when they will gain our insight. The fools have no existence apart from their folly, and the knaves are addicted to displaying their own cleverness.

The dupes bear the most obvious kinship to their Greek forerunners. Jay L. Halio remarks in the introduction to his edition of Volpone,

As one by one Volpone's 'clients' enter in Act I, it is not enough to see merely a procession of greedy legacy-hunters 'presenting' to their patron. We must also see in these depraved characters enough surviving humanity for us to grasp the cruelty to which they are being subjected by Volpone's lust as well as by their own.²

In my opinion quite the contrary is true--we can be amused by the antics of Mosca and Volpone because, as in The Birds, we are prohibited from feeling any sympathy for their gulls. The legacy-hunters are personally reprehensible and incapable of change.

Voltore is the first petitioner introduced, and he is suspect because of his profession. Mosca appears to be voicing a common attitude when he remarks on Volpone's "admiration" for:

¹Alexander Sackton notes this similarity in Rhetoric as a Dramatic Language in Ben Jonson (New York, 1948), p. 45.

²(Berkeley, 1968), p. 1.

the worst, as he not only relishes the thought of Volpone's demise, but actually joins Mosca in screaming insults at his benefactor. By the end of this scene, the audience can feel morally superior to these greedy petitioners and more perceptive than them as well. Later in the play, Mosca will remark:

Too much light blinds 'em, I think. Each of 'em
Is so possessed, and stuffed with his own hopes,
That anything, unto the contrary,
Never so true, or never so apparent,
Never so palpable, they will resist it.
(V. ii. 25-37)

We realize after this first procession that the gulls are in large part responsible for being deceived and will be unwilling to abandon their delusions.

Although it is obvious that the gulls will never be able to overcome the eiiron, the audience is still alerted to expect Volpone's downfall. Anticipation of this outcome is carefully set in the beginning of the play. The prologue insists upon the moral significance of the play, and the extremity of Volpone's opening lines calls for correction: "Open the shrine, that I may see my saint/ Hail the world's soul, and mine!" (2-3). He continues:

Dear saint,
Riches, the dumb god, that givest all men tongues,
That canst do nought, and yet makest men do all things.
The price of souls! Even hell, with thee to boot,
Is made worth heaven. Thou art virtue, fame,
Honor and all things else.
(21-26)

Not only is Volpone arrogant and self-assertive, as are other protagonists of Renaissance and Restoration drama

who are permitted to frolic unchecked, but he is outspokenly blasphemous. The Athenians allowed laughter at their gods, but no attentive viewer of Jonson's drama could expect this vice to go unpunished.

Volpone's exposure is not an event which the audience dreads because he appears ridiculous in this opening speech as well. This impression will be confirmed if action accompanies such lines as:

let me kiss
With adoration, thee, and every relic
Of sacred treasure, in this blessed room.
(11-13)

The magnificence of Volpone's language in his opening speech is admirable, but there is a ludicrous disparity between the statement and the object of worship. The audience allows itself to condone his behavior during the play in part because we realize that his period of license is limited.

The subsequent conversation between Volpone and Mosca provides information and attunes our attitude toward the pair further. We can see that Mosca is not completely subservient to Volpone; he maintains enough independence, in fact, to interrupt his master when the latter's speech waxes out of proportion:

V. Who can get thee,
He shall be noble, valiant, honest, wise--
M. And what he will, sir.

(I. i. 26-28)

In Mosca's speeches of flattery and in the interlude performed by Nano, Castrone, and Androgyno, we see that

Mosca is able accurately to assess Volpone's desires, and to play to them for his own benefit. The danger Don John poses is undercut by having the villainous characteristics divided between him and Borachio. In similar fashion, our regard for Volpone's eloquence and intelligence is diminished by his reliance upon Mosca's chicaneries, and his perverted affection for his parasite.⁴

Since the audience shares the secret of Volpone's disguises with him and Mosca, we might be drawn into the conspiracy. To prevent engagement with these two characters, Jonson always follows a scene of their triumph by one in which they are censured or estranged from the audience. Thus Volpone is rewarded by a beating after he has induced Celia to throw her handkerchief, and Mosca follows his persuasion of Corvino with his remarkable speech of narcissism, starting:

I fear, I shall begin to grow in love
With my dear self, and my most prosperous parts,
They do so spring and burgeon. . . .
(III. i. 1-3)

After their victory in court, Volpone is immediately shown not gloating, but feeling daunted for the first time:

'Fore God, my left leg 'gan to have the cramp;
And I apprehended, straight, some power had struck me
With a dead palsy. . . .
(V. i. 5-7)

⁴William Empson is certainly correct in disagreeing with the widely held view that Volpone's perversity is further demonstrated by his having sired Nano, Castrone, and Androgyno. This is just further slander fed by Mosca to the eager Corvino. See Empson's "Volpone," HudR, 21 (1960), 651-66.

Volpone's successes are thus consistently undercut by ridicule, and the audience is precluded from sympathizing too strongly with the patron and his parasite.

Mosca and Volpone realize that the gulls are controlled by their greed, but they are unaware that their addiction to scheming prescribes their own behavior as well. This is made clear to the audience near the beginning of the play. Volpone and Mosca have successfully stripped Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino of their offerings, when Mosca whets Volpone's appetite for new exploits by describing Corvino's wife. Volpone's desire to enjoy this beauty is inflamed largely by Mosca's remonstrations that she is unattainable. He becomes increasingly adamant as Mosca presents the difficulties: "How might I see her" (I. v. 117), "I must see her" (122), and at last the unequivocal, "I will go see her" (127). Volpone says in the first scene that he glories "More in the cunning purchase of my wealth/ Than in the glad possession" (31-33), and the audience can see that for both Mosca and Volpone the greatest fun lies in the deceiving rather than in the fruits of deception. The completion of one plan must perforce beget another. The audience can delight in the cleverness of Volpone and Mosca, but must realize that they are obsessed with practising their cunning, and thus doomed to exposure.

Not only is the audience given insight which allows us to predict how the characters will behave, we are also

informed of each new project before it is undertaken. The plot advances with the tightness of construction which marked Much Ado. John Enck has noticed that, "The device of comedy generally composes a frame within which events are sometimes moved from what would appear a predestined end. . . . In Volpone, nothing is accidental and, at the same time, nothing forgiveable."⁵ Throughout Volpone all actions result from planning and not from coincidence, and the audience is always informed when a new scheme is in the wind. All the conspirators--Mosca, Volpone, and Peregrine--are equally frank with us about their intentions and always carry out their plans. Since the audience both overhears these plans and can predict the victims' reactions, the plot proceeds with seeming inevitability.

It is especially important that the audience's anticipations be correctly set in this play, because Volpone could be described as a comedy of misplaced expectations. Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino are not funny or foolish only because they are avaricious, but because all their actions are based upon the anticipation of wealth. Their hope for the future leads them to gross misapprehension of the present. Volpone and Mosca are aware that they can control the behavior of the gulls by manipulating their anticipations, and each new plan

⁵Jonson and the Comic Truth (Madison, Wisc., 1957), p. 125.

is consciously formulated to rouse their hopes.

In the opening scene Volpone tells the audience about his supplicants:

That bring me presents, send me plate, coin, jewels,
With hope, that when I die (which they expect
Each greedy minute) it shall then return,
Tenfold, upon them. . . .
(I. i. 78-81)

He goes on, in the same speech, to describe how he deceives them:

All which I suffer, playing with their hope,
And am content to coin 'em into profit,
And look upon their kindness, and take more,
And look on that; still bearing them in hand,
Letting the cherry knock against their lips,
And draw it by their mouths, and back again.
(85-90)

These words are echoed when Volpone and Mosca hatch the new scheme of putting it out that Volpone is dead:

V. I shall have, instantly, my vulture, crow,
Raven, come flying hither, on the news,
To peck for carrion, my she-wolf and all,
Greedy, and full of expectation--
M. And then have it ravished from their mouths?
(V. ii. 63-67)

Volpone and Mosca realize that as long as they can control their victims' anticipations, they can predict their behavior, and the deceptions will succeed. The pair only encounters trouble when trying to manipulate characters whose anticipations they have misjudged.

After Volpone and Mosca exit in Act I to plan the wooing of Celia, the audience is introduced to the last example of misplaced expectations in the person of Sir Politic Would-Be. Volpone has just abandoned his den, and Sir Pol announces that for him too, "fates call

me forth". (II. i. 4). While Volpone is active and plotting, however, Sir Politic is reactive and nervously searching out plots and evil portents.⁶ Sir Politic is, in fact, as afflicted by false anticipations and uncomfortable suspense as Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino.

Sir Politic and Volpone's gulls represent the opposite aspects of the same folly. The legacy-hunters have their eyes set so fixedly on the riches they will acquire in time to come that they cannot detect the conspiracy of Mosca and Volpone. Sir Politic, on the other hand, is so apprehensive about the future that he detects conspiracies in innocent actions. We notice that Sir Pol is less interested in the wonders described by Peregrine than in what they signify for the future. He exclaims, "These things concurring, strange! And full of omen!" (II. i. 37-38), and later, "What should these things portend!" (44). After Sir Politic's character has been firmly established, we view the outcome of Volpone's and Mosca's planning, as Volpone mounts the bank disguised as Scoto Mantuano, with his entourage disguised as zanies.

It is not surprising to discover that Sir Politic is taken in by Volpone's claims for the "oglio del Scoto." He finds it completely plausible that there would be an

⁶Jonas Barish notes Sir Pol's role as a would-be enterpriser and thus comic parody of Volpone, and finds Lady Would-Be similarly ineffective in her attempts to mimic the legacy-hunters. See his "The Double Plot in Volpone," MP, 51 (1953), 83-92.

oil which, if applied now, would change your later condition. The bizarre plans subsequently revealed for aiding the state of Venice--the confiscation of tinderboxes, the purging of ships by blowing air through onions--are forged by Sir Politic in an effort to make his own future more secure. They are plans:

Which I do call my cautions: and sir, which
I mean, in hope of pension, to propound
To the Great Council.

(IV. 1. 72-74)

Sir Politic and the legacy-hunters are all blinded to the present by their false anticipations of the future.

Jonson carefully guides the audience through the play in this manner and establishes comic suspense at the same time: a new plan is always announced before a diverting episode is allowed to intervene, and the characters' behavior is consistent so that we can safely predict how they will react to each event. As in Much Ado, there is always a delay between when the plan is announced and when action is taken. Our concern for the characters is less though than in Shakespeare's play, and in order to increase the suspense, Jonson rarely tells the audience in advance what form the new project will take. We know that Volpone and Mosca will invent a disguise to enable Volpone to see Celia, but are not told what the disguise will be. The information given to the audience is carefully selected--we always know what new project Volpone and Mosca are hatching, but Jonson does not disclose when or how announced plans will be

completed.

After Corvino has beaten off Volpone disguised as Scoto, two short scenes of planning follow. First, Sir Politic views the episode as "some trick of state" and Peregrine encourages his fears, "It may be some design, on you" (II. iii. 11). Sir Politic hurries home while Peregrine meditates, "This knight/ I may not lose him, for my mirth, till night" (15-16). We expect Peregrine to amuse himself further with Sir Pol's paranoia, but we do not know in what way. Immediately attention returns to Mosca and Volpone, and the audience witnesses the effects of the mountebank scene on them. Volpone is indeed smitten by Celia's beauty, and Mosca holds out the possibility that he may in fact enjoy her. First Mosca states, "I doubt not/ To bring success to your designs" (II. iv. 25-26), and then, "I have not time to flatter you now, we'll part:/ And, as I prosper, so applaud my art" (37-38). Once again we know of Mosca's intentions, and can guess that he will succeed, but are not privy to his plans.

Suspense is heightened by delay as the ensuing scene shows Corvino berating Celia for her supposedly lascivious conduct. The extravagance of his language and the knowledge that Mosca is simultaneously plotting to cuckold Corvino, undercut concern for Celia. When we discover Mosca's scheme, we are doubly amused because it involves Corvino's consent. As the scene ends, Mosca

signals that he has a new plan in mind:

But come not, sir,
Until I send, for I have something else
To ripen for your good; you must not know it.
(99-101)

The audience doesn't know what Mosca's plan is either, and we do not find out until we have observed another dispute between Celia and Corvino, and Mosca's soliloquy on parasites. Then we are surprised by Mosca's greeting of Bonario, "The person I was bound to see" (III. ii. 2), and the disclosure that Mosca plans to have Bonario witness his father disinheriting him.

Two plots are now underway and we become almost as irritated as Volpone at Lady Would-Be's prattle, and her presence which obstructs the completion of the two intrigues. Suspense builds a little further after her departure when Corvino arrives early and Mosca must hide Bonario. For the first time Mosca makes a mistake in judging a character's expectations and thereby manipulating his behavior. Mosca imagines that Bonario's anxious anticipation of the encounter between Volpone and his father will make him blind to Mosca's present uneasiness. The behavior of good men is more difficult to control than that of bad, however, and greed does not dominate Bonario's conduct as it does the gulls. As Bonario leaves he voices suspicion of Mosca, "I do doubt this fellow" (16).

In the subsequent wooing of Celia it is obvious that Volpone has similarly misjudged Celia's hopes and

anticipations. When he announces:

See, behold,
What thou art queen of; not in expectation,
As I feed others; but possessed and crown'd
(III. vii. 188-90)

he fails to perceive that the riches and erotic pleasures he pictures horrify rather than delight the poor girl. Again we do not worry for Celia since we know that she will not yield to Volpone, and we can't imagine her being raped.⁷ Thus we are not completely taken aback by her rescue although we had forgotten Bonario in the magnificence of Volpone's language. Mosca's and Volpone's misassess-ment of expectations has nearly brought about their un-doing, but their continuing trust in Corbaccio's, Corvino's, and Voltore's greed is rewarded and blame is shifted on the innocent. Voltore is not only convinced by Mosca's story but points to legal action against Bonario, saying, "Bring him to the Scrutineo" (III. ix. 55).

The Sir Politic-Peregrine story intervenes and we are again given contrast between the imagined conspir-acies that Sir Pol smells out, and the real ones of Mosca and Volpone to which their gulls are oblivious. At the end of the exchange, Peregrine, mistakenly thinking that Sir Politic has been acting as a pander for his wife,⁸

⁷Douglas Duncan notes that concern is further diminished by the placement of this episode immediately after the audience has witnessed Volpone completely overpowered by Lady Would-Be's verbal assault. See his "Audience-Manipulation in Volpone," WascanaR, 5 (1970), p. 34.

⁸This is pointed out by C. G. Thayer, Ben Jonson: Studies in the Plays (Norman, Okla., 1963), p. 65.

promises retaliation:

Well, wise Sir Pol: since you have practised, thus,
Upon my freshmanship, I'll try your salt-head,
What proof it is against a counter-plot.
(IV. iii. 24)

Both stories are approaching a climax, and suspense is keen since the audience can anticipate the court scene and Sir Pol's humiliation, but does not know what specific action the plotters have in mind.

The scene then shifts to the courtroom, and we see the three gulls assembled and can predict how they will behave under Mosca's coaching. Mosca indicates to Voltore that he has something further up his sleeve:

M. I have another witness, if you need, sir,
I can produce.
V. Who is it?
M. Sir, I have her.
(IV. iv. 27)

If we are especially attentive to the pronouns, we will guess who this is, but even so it is impossible to envisage what benefit she will serve as a witness. In the trial itself, the audience cannot fear for Celia and Bonario--they remain silent except for a few platitudes, so we do not identify with them, nor see the danger as they do. This allows us to enjoy the brazenness of their accusers, none of whom is content with a simple lie but must inflate and amplify his falsehoods. Bonario and Celia will clearly be exonerated before they are sentenced, but how proof of their innocence will be produced is uncertain.

After the trial, there are no new plots in progress, and the knaves are momentarily content to glory in thoughts of their previous triumphs. Mosca states flatly:

We must, here, be fixed:
Here we must rest; this is our masterpiece:
We cannot think to go beyond this.

(V. 11. 12-14)

Volpone agrees, "True,/ Thou'st played thy prize, my precious Mosca" (14-15). Predictably, however, the reminiscences of their previous exploits, soon lead them on to new ones, and Volpone formulates the scheme of putting it out that he is dead. No longer content with the old charade, their plots become more daring and dangerous.

There is only a short delay while Mosca and Volpone refine their plans before the dupes arrive. Then Mosca and Volpone stir the expectation of further action with the scheme of Volpone taunting the gulls in the guise of a commendatore. The Politic-Peregrine plot intervenes for the final time. Once again the episode is related to the main story by its opening line. Peregrine's "Am I enough disguised?" (V. iv. 20) recalls that Volpone has just ventured forth in the guise of a minor court official. We finally see the results of Peregrine's resolution to requite himself, and as expected, he is able to expose Sir Pol's foolishness.⁹

⁹ For a good discussion of this episode, see Ian Donaldson's "Jonson's Tortoise," *RES*, 19 (1968), 162-66. Donaldson argues that Sir Pol's retreat into the tortoise shell is thematically appropriate because the tortoise was a symbol of both policy and silence, but concludes that the scene may not work dramatically.

After Sir Politic is dismissed, the audience's attention returns to Volpone and Mosca, and we learn, after Volpone has left in his disguise, that Mosca plans to betray his master:

My Fox
Is out on his hole, and, ere he shall re-enter,
I'll make him languish in his borrowed case,
Except he come to composition, with me.
(V. v. 6-9)

Volpone has made a double error: he thought he could entice Celia with the expectations of great wealth, and he believed that Mosca would be immune to the temptations of similar expectations. The strength of the conspirators lay in their unity, and with Mosca's remarks we can anticipate their downfall. At this point only Mosca shares the audience's knowledge and we view Volpone's subsequent taunting of the legacy-hunters with a double sense of irony--Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino do not know that the commendatore is Volpone, but Volpone does not know that Mosca plans to double-cross him. The audience's insight exceeds that of all the characters because we realize that Mosca's decision will bring about his own ruin.

In the final court scene we are initially surprised to learn that Voltore has recanted his testimony since this is the only plan which we had not been informed of in advance. Once Volpone and Mosca have had Mosca proclaimed heir, they have released their hold over the gulls' expectations and thus over their conduct. Volpone

soon realizes this, however, and announces that he will devise a counter-plot to "Unscrew my advocate, upon new hopes" (IV. xi. 21). As could be expected, he is able to convince the gullible lawyer, and nothing comes of Voltore's short flirtation with honesty. Mosca has anticipated incorrectly, however, in gambling that Volpone would suffer his parasite to enjoy all the wealth rather than reveal his own role in the conspiracy. This is a grave mistake, and Volpone exposes them all.

John Enck states of Volpone, Epicoene, and The Alchemist, "By their denials they still celebrate freedom. In them a character is chained neither by nemesis nor hubris, but by a chimera which he has created and which, in turn, enslaves him."¹⁰ In Volpone the gulls, by their refusal to alter their expectations, actively participate in their own duping, and the knaves are entrapped in their own cleverness. Their failures are not shared by the audience, however, which does not suffer from misplaced expectations. For us, Volpone is an essentially predictable play. There is no uncertainty over when the characters will gain our insight since each one is incapable of change; Volpone's and Mosca's intentions are always announced so that there is never a question of what project they will undertake next. Comic suspense is indeed established--we never wonder what is going to happen, only when or how the announced plans will be

¹⁰p. 241.

carried out. The audience can see so clearly what is going on at the moment, and can predict so confidently what will later occur, that the failure of the characters to make these assessments is especially striking.

Volpone, like The Birds, presents a world in which events are completely subject to human control. Peisthetairus's strength lies in his intractable personality--neither he nor the audience can predict what will happen next but the steadfastness with which he greets all comers assures his victory. In Volpone, on the other hand, this stubborn clinging to personality is shown to be the source not of power, but of folly. Consistency in outlook and reactions makes a character's conduct predictable and thus open to exploitation. Power comes from being able to adapt attitudes to events and correctly predict how others will behave--in other words, true power is granted to the audience rather than the characters.

Mosca and Volpone can control their victims' activities as long as they can accurately assess and then manipulate their expectations. In Bartholomew Fair, too, power belongs to those who share the audience's ability to see characters' weaknesses and predict their behavior. When Quarlous or the people of the fair decide to capitalize on a character's failing--whether it be Cokes's simple-mindedness, Busy's gluttony, or Win's latent promiscuity--they invariably succeed. None of them are

as consistently adept as Mosca and Volpone, however. Fragmentation occurs because of the large number of exploiters, each of whom is working to his own advantage and plagued by his own obsession.

The different impression left by the later play also results from the way in which it is organized. In Volpone after the first procession of gulls, the audience's expectations are set for three levels of action. Most immediately, we expect Volpone in disguise to see Celia; later we anticipate further exploitation of the gulls; and arching over both these actions and controlling our response, we realize that eventually Mosca and Volpone must be exposed. We have seen how The Birds, once the city has been established, lacks that third governing element. This is also true of Bartholomew Fair and marks it as a non-linear or contextual drama. The fair's peddlers are dependent upon the whims of their customers, and once the visitors arrive at the fair, there is no single motivation for their actions. There is no goal to which all the events are moving, and the audience's anticipations are set for the completion of individual episodes, not for a grand dénouement.

Despite the chaotic, brawling atmosphere of the fair itself, events are still controllable and plans can be made in advance. There are two types of plans in Bartholomew Fair: those made by a person to fill his appetite, and those made by other characters to exploit

these longings. As in Volpone, these intentions are always announced. The opening act is also like that of Volpone in providing information on what action to expect from each of the characters. It is denser than the earlier play, however, because more information and insight about more characters have to be passed on. In Volpone we learn that the major character is feigning mortal illness to attract legacy-hunters, that one of the petitioners is willing to disinherit his son in hopes of Volpone's estate, and that Volpone is determined to see the beautiful wife of another. In Bartholomew Fair, the information the audience receives points to a much more diffused action--Littlewit has written a puppet show which will be performed at the fair; Bartholomew Cokes has a license to marry Grace, but she is reluctant (I. v. 79-80); Winwife is courting the wealthy Purecraft but she is more inclined to his friend Quarlous because she has been told that she would marry a madman and he is "the more madcap o' the two" (I. iii. 38). We hear too that Dame Purecraft is a Puritan and is entertaining one of the brothers from Banbury.

Most of the characters arrive singly and our attention is at least briefly concentrated on each. It becomes rapidly apparent that like the gulls in Volpone, each character suffers from a preoccupation which controls his behavior and allows the audience to predict his actions. The weakness is revealed by the character's own language

and by the comments of others as well. John Littlewit first introduces himself, remarking on the "conceit" that both the license and the fair bear the same name. He adds,

When a quirk or a quiblin does 'scape thee, and thou dost not watch, and apprehend it, and bring it afore the constable of conceit (there now, I speak quib too), let 'em carry thee out o' the archdeacon's court into his kitchen, and make a Jack of thee, instead of a John.

(I. i. 11-16)¹¹

We can recognize Littlewit as that very trying person, the humorless but compulsive jokester. In the later exchanges the audience learns that although he dotes upon Win, he feels compelled to share her embraces with others. First he orders, "Dear Win, let Master Winwife kiss you" (I. ii. 8), then he reprimands her for resisting Quarlous's advances, "They'll do you no harm, Win, they are both our worshipful good friends. Master Quarlous! You must know Master Quarlous, Win. . ." (I. iii. 43-45). There is a bit of Corvino in Littlewit and his wife is a more willing victim.

Wasp's pugnacity is likewise revealed in his opening speech: "I know? I know nothing, I. What tell you me of knowing? Now I am in haste, sir, I do not know. and I will not know, and I scorn to know, and yet (now I think on't) I will and do know as well as another. . ." (I. iv. 18-21). Although each character is blind to his own fault, he notes those of others. Littlewit can see

¹¹Citations from Bartholomew Fair are to Eugene M. Waith, ed., The Yale Ben Jonson (New Haven, 1963).

how Wasp's conduct is governed by his anger and he cautions Quarlous, "Sir, if you have a mind to mock him, mock him softly, and look tother way; for if he apprehend you flout him once, he will fly at you presently. A terrible testy old fellow, and his name is Wasp too" (39-42). Despite the advice given both Wasp and Littlewit to modify their behavior (I. vi. 21-22; 66-74), the audience realizes that neither is capable of change. Wasp pays no attention to his own failing, but he does understand the incapacities of his charge, "He has a headful of bees" (74), and when we see Cokes he fits Wasp's description. Cokes speaks almost as a child--"Nay, never fidge up and down, Numps, and vex itself" (I. v. 58)--and his attention flits quickly from one subject to another. His affection even momentarily abandons Grace, and he remarks, "A pretty little soul, this same Mistress Littlewit! Would I might marry her" (77-78). Wasp indicates what will happen when such an innocent as Cokes goes to the fair,

. . . he will buy of everything to a baby there; and household stuff for that too. If a leg or an arm on him did not grow on, he would lose it i' the press. Pray heaven I bring him off with one stone! And then he is such a ravener after fruit!

(106-09)

Wasp is not exaggerating here--his words are an accurate indication of what will occur.

Of the so-called normative characters, Quarlous and Winwife are fairly conventional young rakes, although Quarlous is the more talkative and self-assertive of the

two. He also has a distinctive manner of speaking. As Jonas Barish states,

Quarlous' rapid-fire style carries to one extreme the power of baroque rhetoric to suggest incipient rather than finished thought. Ideas seem to leap and tumble at random from the tongue, scarcely half-formed in the brain beforehand.¹²

The audience can expect that his speech betokens impetuous conduct as well. Grace is fairly anonymous, but she is outspoken in her contempt for Bartholomew and for "his" fair. Quarlous and Winwife are clearly attracted to her, as Quarlous remarks, "She seems to be discreet, and as sober as she is handsome" (I. v. 51-52). We can anticipate that their relationship may deepen.

Purecraft and Busy are the last to be introduced in this act, and we look forward to their arrival because they have previously been described with disparagement by so many other characters. Littlewit and Win both decry Busy's voracious appetite for food and drink. Quarlous adds other vices to that of gluttony, saying, "A notable hypocritical vermin it is; I know him. One that stands upon his face more than his faith, at all times; ever in seditious motion, and reprovng for vain-glory. . ." (I. ii. 126-28). Dame Purecraft is a fit companion, as Littlewit notes, "Our mother is a most elect hypocrite, and has maintained us all this seven year with it, like gentlefolk" (I. v. 149-51). Purecraft and Busy are thus already

¹²Ben Jonson and the Language of Prose Comedy (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), p. 193.

familiar to us before we see them, and they fulfill our anticipations. Indeed, the extravagance of Busy's language is beyond anything the audience could have hoped.

The characters are all strong-willed, and in the first act although the motivations vary, all the wills are directed toward a common purpose--getting to the fair. The audience has no important piece of information denied the characters, and our anticipations concerning what will happen to them when they arrive are based solely upon our superior insight. As in Volpone we do not expect change from the characters--how could Cokes possibly acquire wisdom, Wasp gain equanimity, or Busy modify his speech?¹³ We know that each character carries his own aggressive personality like an army's standard with him into the fair, and the audience can therefore predict how each will get along. We anticipate that Cokes will fall easy prey to the hucksters; that Wasp will quarrel and complain incessantly; that Busy will expound upon the fair's vices; that Littlewit will continue to jump upon "quibs"; and that Quarlous, Winwife, and Grace will comment upon the behavior of others. Comic suspense results from being able to predict how the characters will react but wondering when the various personalities will collide with others at the fair and how the characters will be

¹³Barish calls Busy, "the most complete linguistic impostor in Jonson," noting, "With Busy, one feels that every syllable is ersatz, maliciously manufactured out of alien matter to produce an impenetrable mask" pp. 203-04.

able to take advantage of each other's weaknesses. The audience has now met the dupes and can look forward to the introduction of their exploiters.

Our expectations are delayed, however, because first we meet the final visitor, Justice Overdo. We quickly note his idiosyncratic speech and self-conscious posturing,

. . . defy all the world, Adam Overdo, for a disguise, and all story; for thou hast fitted thyself, I swear. Fain would I meet the Lynceus now, that eagle's eye, that piercing Epidaurian serpent (as my Quintus Horace calls him), that could discover a justice of peace (and lately of the quorum) under this covering.

(II. 1. 2-7)

Justice Overdo goes on to state that he has come to the fair to search out "enormities," and indicates that he views himself as an Old Testament Jehovah, come to unmask and strike down the sinners.¹⁴ From our brief acquaintance, we already perceive Overdo to be unequal to his task, but the audience does share a secret with him, and can expect that the cloud which obscures Overdo's judgment will make his disguise impenetrable. Knowing of Overdo's disguise, however, is not as important as being aware of Volpone's. Volpone's disguises were always assumed to provoke others to action, while Overdo poses as Mad Arthur precisely so that his presence will not affect the conduct

¹⁴Jackson I. Cope details this parallel in "Bartholomew Fair as Blasphemy," RenD, 8 (1965), 127-52. Cope is perhaps too ready to equate Jonson's use of the Justice with Overdo's own perception of his role.

of others.

In Act I and the opening of Act II, then, we see characters spurred by various motives and obsessed by various concerns, but united in the determination to go to the fair. Once the parties arrive, even this unity collapses, and actions result from individual quirks of character rather than a joining of wills. Indeed, the characters' separate volitions are much more likely to move them at cross-purposes than in harmony, and two people rarely desire the same objective. The plot does not have a governing purpose, and the audience has no finale to anticipate which will conclude all the disparate action. Instead, Jonson controls the audience's attention by building comic suspense within scenes.

This suspense is generated, first, by the inflexibility of the characters' personalities, which allows the audience to predict how they will behave as soon as they step on stage. In addition, the audience is informed of intended action before it is undertaken. Similar characters quickly gravitate toward each other, and the audience frequently has the opportunity of hearing one group plan how its members will behave toward another. At other times, a character will lapse into a soliloquy which will indicate his reactions and intentions. Overdo does this at the beginning of Act II when he ponders his disguise and resolves what to do to correct the vices of the fair. Furthermore, in striking contrast to Volpone, Bartholomew

Fair abounds in asides, which allow characters to inform the audience of their plans and emotions. During the course of the drama, Justice Overdo is the only one whose attitudes appear to modify, and his behavior is always prepared for by his running commentary in asides on what "enormities" he thinks he detects, how he is reacting, and what new action he means to undertake. The chaos of the fair is thus controlled: it results from the playwright's manipulation of the audience's attention rather than from surprising events or changes in personality. The outcome of each episode can be surmised and uncertainty is restricted to when Jonson will allow us to view the unfolding of the various plots.

In the second act we are provided with foreknowledge of events in all of these ways, and Jonson maintains comic suspense by forcing a new group into our attention before the anticipated actions of the first have been completed. After Overdo's opening soliloquy, we are introduced to the peddlers of the fair in similar fashion to how we met the visitors in Act I. They are grouped, moreover, in such a way as to increase our anticipation for the arrival of their customers. The first who enter are those who will clearly appeal to Cokes--we see the baubles and breads of Leatherhead and Trash, the pears of the costermonger, and hear a snatch of Nightingale's ballads. Wasp had mentioned earlier that Cokes dotes upon all of these things, and we thus

can look forward to his dealing with these hawkers.

Ursula, Mooncalf, and Knockem are then introduced; knowing that the Puritans have set forth in search of pig, we can anticipate their arrival at Ursula's booth. Overdo tells us his reaction to the pig-woman in an aside, "Well, I will fall in with her, and with her Mooncalf, and win out wonders of enormity" (II. ii. 109-11). The company is joined by Edgworth, and the audience listens in while he plots with Nightingale to pick pockets. He tells his confederate, "All the purses and purchase I give you today by conveyance, bring hither to Urs'la's presently. . . . Look you choose good places for your standing i' the Fair when you sing, Nightingale" (II. iv. 35-7; 38-40). While they talk, the audience feels suspense concerning Overdo's reaction, but we soon learn that he does not hear them. Instead, he has mistaken Edgworth for a good clerk who has fallen into bad company and resolves to spend the whole day, if need be, to release and reform the youth. The audience has now met all the vendors and sharksters of the fair; we can anticipate them preying upon the visitors. In addition, Edgworth has formulated a specific plan to reap profit from inattentiveness.

Quarlous and Winwife are the first visitors to run the fair's gauntlet, and they disregard most of the temptations. They are able to ignore Leatherhead and Trash, but Quarlous sets our expectations for Cokes's

arrival once again by remarking, "Would Cokes would come! There were a true customer for 'em" (II. v. 17-18). Although they avoid Ursula's wares, Quarlous cannot resist arguing with Knockem and the pig-woman and the pair must be driven off by Ursula's pig pan. Edgworth tells us that he will not attempt to rob them, "these fellows were too fine to carry money" (164-65). Our remaining interest in Quarlous and Winwife lies in their relationship with Grace, but they leave before the Cokes party enters.

Overdo launches into a speech--Mooncalf had already told the audience he was "studying for an oration" (II. iv. 62)--and Edgworth confides that he will use the occasion to pick pockets. If the audience weren't sure that Cokes would fall victim, Wasp's warning to him alerts us, "If you do lose your licence, or somewhat else, sir, with listening to his fable, say Numps is a witch, with all my heart do, say so" (II. vi. 29-31). During Overdo's speech we experience pure comic suspense--we know that Edgworth will pick Cokes's pocket, but we don't know when, and we look forward to Cokes's and Wasp's reactions.

When the purse is found to be missing, Wasp sputters in typical fashion, "Now, as I am no infidel, that I know of, I am glad on 't. Aye I am; here's my witness! do you see, sir? I did not tell you of his fables, I? No, no, I am a dull malt-horse, I, I know nothing" (98-100). Cokes takes his loss so lightly that we cannot feel sorry for him and are amused when he puts his other purse in the

same pocket. He says he will tempt the pickpocket, "I would ha' come again, and but offer at it" (117), and Edgworth tells us in an aside that he will take the challenge. The act ends in confusion as Wasp takes out his anger on Overdo. The audience at this point can anticipate three events: Overdo's reaction to the beating; Edgworth's stealing from Cokes again; and, since the other visitors have all been greeted by the fair's vendors, the arrival of the Puritans at the pig-booth. We also know that eventually Cokes will meet up with the costermonger, Leatherhead and Trash, and can anticipate further displays of his foolishness and Wasp's anger. Since Cokes has shown himself impervious to pain and humiliation, comic suspense has been established and we look forward to all the action.

The rest of the play follows the same pattern of informing the audience of events in advance, but interweaving episodes so that we never know when we will see a group of characters again. Furthermore, as soon as one action is completed, a new undertaking is promised. In Act III Quarlous announces the entrance of the Puritan family--"Look! who comes here!" (III. ii. 19). Once the arrival of Busy is thus heralded, suspense and excitement are generated because we can predict how he will react to the lures of the fair. When Leatherhead and Trash initially misjudge the Rabbi and try to sell him their goods, Busy expounds, "The wares are the wares of devils; and the whole Fair is the shop of Satan! They

are hooks and baits, very baits, that are hung out on every side to catch you, and to hold you as it were. . . ." (III. ii. 37-39). As expected from the earlier description, Busy's gluttony causes him to be less disdainful of the pig-booth, however. The group is ensconced in a booth, and Busy urges eagerly, "A pig prepare presently; let a pig be prepared to us" (94). Win still has a longing to see the sights, and Littlewit promises both her and the audience that they will not depart directly from the pig-booth (III. ii. 89).

Our attention is then turned to Overdo, who in a lengthy soliloquy announces that he will no longer orate but will maintain his disguise. Cokes's party reappears, and we feel comic suspense as soon as Cokes is in the vicinity of Leatherhead's and Trash's booths because we know that here is their proper customer. With typical extravagance, Cokes buys them both out. Trash immediately informs the audience of another project to take advantage of his simple-mindedness, saying of Leatherhead, ". . . you shall see him in his velvet jerkin, and scarf too, at night, when you hear him interpret Master Littlewit's motion" (129-31). We know as well as Trash that Cokes will be attracted to the puppets and look forward to their next encounter. The mere appearance of Overdo, Busy, or Cokes on stage is now enough to generate comic suspense. We can look forward to Busy's extravagant denunciations, Overdo's ruminations on rescuing Edgworth,

and Cokes's foolish prodigality.

The final action that was anticipated at the end of Act II now gets underway as Edgworth and Nightingale spot Cokes and rush to entice him with ballads before he parts with too much of his money. Cokes, as expected, welcomes the new arrivals, and his pocket is once again picked. Our enjoyment is increased by having the spell-binder this time Nightingale singing of cutpurses. Suspense is also increased by Winwife's and Quarlous's detection of Edgworth, and Quarlous promises new action by contracting with Edgworth to steal Cokes's license from Wasp. Grace falls in with Winwife and Quarlous, as we had been led to anticipate from her first introduction. Their relationship has little chance to develop, however, since the Littlewit party drives the trio away.

Win wants to see the sights, but Busy, fortified with pig and ale, is filled with holy fervor. The peddlers have learned from their previous encounter with the Rabbi and while he is denouncing the "peeping popery upon the stalls," we overhear Littlewit and Leatherhead plotting to be rid of him. The officers take Busy to the stocks, but Win still cannot explore the fair because she must return to Ursula's booth. All the actions have been interrupted before completed and we therefore have expectations for all the groups in the fair. Win will return to the pig-booth; we will see Busy and Overdo in the stocks; and Winwife and Quarlous will court Grace.

In addition, Edgworth will steal the license from Wasp and the audience will discover how Cokes will react to the loss of his goods.

In the first scene of Act IV, the anticipated action is once again delayed, this time by the diversion provided by Trouble-All and Bristle. Then we view in rapid succession: Overdo and Busy in the stocks; Cokes missing Leatherhead and Trash but finally encountering the costermonger; and Winwife and Quarlous vying for Grace's love. Each episode ends inconclusively, however, and expectations are set for further events. Overdo resolves to make amends to Trouble-All, and he is taken with Busy to be brought before the Justice; Cokes cannot find his way out of the fair; and Quarlous leaves Grace to watch the game of vapours described by Edgworth, not knowing who won the lottery for her love. The game of vapours also evokes comic suspense. Although the audience isn't sure exactly what the players will say, we know that each is bound to contradict the last speaker, so we can anticipate the nature of their responses. We also can predict that Quarlous's argumentativeness will draw him into the fray, and that Edgworth, recognizing Wasp's partiality for a quarrel, can use the occasion to steal the license, but we are uncertain when or how he will accomplish his task. As the game ends, new action is indicated when Wasp is taken to the stocks, and Mistress Overdo seems inclined to be one of Whit's "birds o' the game," as she confesses,

"Yes, Captain, though I am justice of peace's wife, I do love men and the sons of the sword, when they come before my husband" (IV. iv. 209-11).

Finally Littlewit reaches the booth with Win, and the audience can guess who will join Mistress Overdo. Act IV closes with unfinished action also--Busy, Overdo, and Wasp escape from the stocks, and we know that they will return to the fair; Overdo repeats that he will make amends to Trouble-All; Quarlous announces that he will disguise himself as Trouble-All to discover whose name was marked in Grace's book; and Dame Purecraft declares herself in love, "The world is mad in error, but he is mad in truth. I love him o' the sudden (the cunning man said all true), and shall love him more and more" (157-59).

The start of Act V furthers none of these intentions, however, and instead we see Leatherhead putting up his new sign, reminding us of the puppet show to follow. As the action on announced plans gets underway, Overdo observes Quarlous disguised as Trouble-All and repeats his intention to compensate for his hard-heartedness. After Quarlous discovers that Winwife's name has been marked, he decides to take advantage of Purecraft's attraction to him, making a new resolution, "It is money that I want; why should I not marry the money, when 'tis offered me? I have a licence and all; it is but the razing out one name and putting in another" (74-77). Overdo provides Quarlous with additional benefit by presenting him with

a blank warrant, which Quarlous instantly tells the audience he will use. All the action promised at the end of Act IV has now been completed, and we look forward to the puppet show. We also know that the two disguisers will eventually unmask: Quarlous will claim his prizes, and Overdo has promised that he will "break out in rain and hail, lightning and thunder, upon the head of enormity" (V. ii. 4-6).

Suspense increases as each visitor drifts on stage for the show because the audience is aware of disclosures which will be made to each. Cokes will learn that he has lost not only his money and trappings, but his fiancée as well; Winwife will discover that although he has won Grace, he must pay Quarlous for her hand; Overdo and Littlewit will learn that their wives have consented to become whores; Whit and Knockem will learn that their wrongdoings have been detected by Justice Overdo; and Numps will find out that his period of authority over Cokes has ended.

As in Acts I and II, the characters arrive singly or in small groups so that suspense is heightened and attention is focused on each in turn. Cokes is, not surprisingly, the first to be drawn to the puppet booth and Littlewit confides to him the argument of the show. It will be the story of Hero and Leander, only made "a little easy and modern for the times" (V. iii. 111-12). The company assemble, but the show is delayed because Littlewit has gone off in search of his wife. We know

that she is there in disguise, but the counting of heads should remind the audience of who in fact is missing.

The puppet show itself is amusing because of the situation in which it is presented; our attitude toward the spectators parallels theirs toward the puppets. This correspondence is underscored by the warnings which preface both shows. Jonson tells us in the Induction that no one should "expect more than he knows, or better ware than a Fair will afford" (112-13). Leatherhead has similar fears for his production, telling Cokes, "Do not you breed too great an expectation of it among your friends. That's the only hurter of these things" (V. iv. 11-13). Suspense is also similar--the spectators at the puppet show know how the story will end, but in Littlewit's altered version they know neither how nor when the climax will be achieved. The audience for Jonson's play realizes that the characters will soon discover our secrets but is not sure how or when the disclosures will be made.

The show ends abruptly with Busy's entrance on the line of the Puppet Dionysus, "I cannot, I will not, I promise you, endure it" (V. iv. 323). Busy's argument against the puppet proceeds along the standard Puritan line until the cause fails him when he is confronted with the fact that the puppets are sexless. In the only real surprise of the play, Busy announces that he is changed and will watch the show with the rest. The audience is not left to contemplate his conversion for long, however,

since Overdo unmask immediately afterwards, announcing, "It is time to take enormity by the forehead, and brand it; for I have discovered enough" (V. v. 113-14). We can laugh at the thunder with which Overdo delivers his judgments because we know that he will soon discover that his own wife is one of the "green madams" he is chastizing.

When the revelations are completed, and Overdo invites the assemblage to dinner, the Justice still maintains his characteristic quirks. He announces to the company, including the undoubtedly stupified Whit, Knockem, Edgworth, and Ursula, "my intents are ad correctionem, non ad destructionem; ad aedificandum, non ad diruendum" (108-09). Cokes pipes up instructing that the puppets be brought along too so that the show can be finished, and we realize that even Cokes has come through the experience of the fair unscathed. Most of the characters cannot control what happens in Bartholomew Fair, but they can cope with the events, even if only by stoical acceptance or by simple-minded ignorance of their effects.

As noted earlier, The Birds and Bartholomew Fair share the same type of structure. In both, the main objective is achieved early in the play--Cloude cuckooland is established and the various parties arrive at the fair--and the rest of the play is devoted to elaborating on the results of that achievement. The action then becomes disjointed with frequent and arbitrary shifts of focus. In Volpone, the knave and his parasite often seem to

control the action: both The Birds and Bartholomew Fair demonstrate the mastery of the playwright by placing the manipulation of events clearly in his hands. The audience does not wonder what the characters will do next because they always tell us, but they have no control over the timing of their undertakings and we do not know when the playwright will allow us to view the completion of their announced plans. In The Birds a point of interest is always left unresolved when the action is interrupted. This is also true of Bartholomew Fair--the difference in Jonson's play is that there are so many unrelated events taking place that the interval of expectancy is often prolonged. Comic suspense in Jonson's play is maintained within individual scenes by the consistency of characterization which allows both the audience and the exploiters to predict the behavior of each person when he comes on stage. Suspense in Bartholomew Fair is thus used not only to tie the scenes together but to increase the impact of each foreseen action when it does occur.

The Birds and Bartholomew Fair are alike also in distinguishing the characters by their habits of speech: each challenge to Peisthetaerus is made by an abuser of language, and in Jonson's play it is remarkable that even the "extras" of the fair, like the watchmen Northern and Puppy, have their own idiosyncratic dialect. The difference, of course, is that Peisthetaerus is able to triumph through his rhetoric, whereas in Bartholomew

Fair no one voice is able to rise above the others.

Aristophanes's play shows Peisthetaerus overcoming every obstacle placed in his way--none of the characters in Jonson's plays demonstrate similar mastery. The knaves in Volpone can predict how their victims will behave and thus control their conduct, but they fail to perceive that their obsession with plotting has circumscribed their own actions as well. In Bartholomew Fair too, foreknowledge means power, and comic suspense underscores the mastery of the audience. Various characters are able to predict the actions of others and turn them into gain--Littlewit can use Busy's gluttony to his advantage, Edgworth profits from Wasp's irascibility, and almost all capitalize on Cokes's simple-mindedness. None of them is able to see his own failings, however, and thus each in turn behaves predictably and is the victim of another. Jonson again forces the burden of complete perception upon the audience.¹⁵ In both of Jonson's plays, we are the ones responsible for detecting the folly of the obsessions of all characters, and foreseeing how they will react to each of the play's enticements. The characters are blinded by their preoccupations, but the audience is not and our anticipations are fulfilled.

¹⁵Ian Donaldson in The World Upside-Down (Oxford, 1970), reaches a similar conclusion in viewing the play as an "anti-masque" with the court and King James providing the necessary correction to the rule of disorder. I think his remarks are applicable to any audience. Donaldson's discussion of Bartholomew Fair occupies pages 46-77.

Jonson's elimination of suspense concerning when characters will gain insight, his shifting of emphasis away from what will happen next to how characters will react to events, and granting more power to the audience than to the characters, prefigure much of modern comedy. Specifically, we shall see that Shaw also uses static characters and is unafraid of obviously manipulating the action in order to instruct the audience.

CHAPTER V

G. B. SHAW AND INSTRUCTIONS IN FORESIGHT

Like Jonson, George Bernard Shaw wrote plays that were conventionally organized and those with non-linear or contextual plots. Arms and the Man is typical of Shaw's early work. Charles Carpenter notes of this play,

. . . despite similarities to military melodrama, /it/ derives most of its lasting effects from a series of near-farcical events which alternately advance and impede a pair of amusingly interlocked love affairs. In the manner of Shakespearean romantic comedy, the play tickles the spectator's sense of mental superiority, flutters his romantic impulses, and leaves him fully gratified at the end.¹

Shaw himself acknowledged his debt to conventional plot technique in his early plays, remarking, "I did the old stuff in the old way, because, as it happened, I could do it superlatively well."²

In Arms and the Man as in Shakespeare's comedies, both the audience and the characters are "fully gratified at the end." Instead of ending with exposure or punishment like Volpone and Bartholomew Fair, Arms and the Man concludes with the happy joining of couples, as in Much Ado. The way to the happy ending, however, is different than

¹Bernard Shaw and the Art of Destroying Ideals (Madison, Wisc., 1969), p. 27. A similar comparison is drawn by Homer Woodbridge, George Bernard Shaw: Creative Artist (Carbondale, Ill., 1963), p. 34.

²"My Way with a Play," London Observer, 29 Sept. 1946. Quoted in E. J. West ed., Shaw on Theatre (New York, 1968), p. 272.

in Shakespeare's plays: although the old techniques of secrets and deception are used to advance the plot and to generate suspense, they are less important than the insight into the characters' personalities which Shaw transmits to his audience. Once the final secrets are disclosed in Much Ado, All's Well, and The Winter's Tale, the drama ends. In fact, if Don John and Borachio had not tricked Claudio, if Helena had meekly acquiesced to Bertram's rejection, if Perdita had not been rescued by the shepherd, there would be no comedy at all. But in Arms and the Man, the action continues long after Sergius has discovered that Raina entertained Bluntschli in her bedroom, and after Raina realizes that Sergius has been flirting with Louka. This play ends when each character has gained all the insight which he is capable of absorbing. Comic suspense here is similar to what it would be in Much Ado if the entire Claudio-Hero-Don John side of the plot were eliminated and attention was focused solely on Benedick's and Beatrice's realization of their true emotions.

The obstacles to the characters' happiness are self-imposed but they are not insurmountable, and the audience is tipped off that the lovers will eventually resolve all difficulties. Comedy's theme of the power of man is again extended to include the characters: the audience's anticipations of a happy ending are fulfilled, and the characters are able to satisfy their desires as

soon as they become aware of what these really are.

Since the important movement in Arms and the Man is psychological, Shaw carefully shows any flaws in the personality of each character as he or she is introduced, and indicates any capacity for change. The first scene between Raina and Catherine shows their extreme romanticism but also reveals that Raina at least has some doubts about the validity of her beliefs. She muses, ". . . perhaps we only had our heroic ideas because we were so fond of reading Byron and Pushkin, and because we were so delighted with the opera that season at Bucharest" (p. 6).³ For the moment, though, her fears are quieted, and her subsequent rhapsody is clearly comic because it is so naive,

Oh, to think that it was all true! that Sergius is just as splendid and noble as he looks! that the world is really a glorious world for women who can see its glory and men who can act its romance! What happiness! what unspeakable fulfillment!
(p. 6)

Like the opening monologues of Volpone or Twelfth Night, this over-statement demands correction.

Our estimation of Raina rises in the subsequent action--she is not afraid when Bluntschli bursts into her room, and she handles the Russian officer with aplomb while hiding Bluntschli behind the curtain. Raina is no

³Citations from Arms and the Man are to Louis Crompton's edition (New York, 1969). Crompton uses the Constable edition prepared by Shaw in 1931, and retains his spelling and punctuation.

mere clown like her mother, and the audience responds to her, as to Beatrice, with a mixture of condescension and admiration. In the exchange with Bluntschli, we laugh at her romantic protestations and her ingenuous pride in the family position, but at the same time we are impressed by her courage and compassion.

The audience also witnesses the shift of Raina's emotions. When she must first deal with Bluntschli, the stage directions prescribe that she do so with "disdain" and then "dignified patience." In the discussion after she has hidden Bluntschli, the audience watches as her contempt for him alternates and becomes mingled with maternal protectiveness. This change is indicated by stage directions which portray Raina as "a little moved," "disarmed by pity," and "touched."⁴ Her final statement in Act I, "Dont, mamma: the poor darling is worn out. Let him sleep" and her mother's startled response, "The poor darling! Raina! ! !" (p. 23) demonstrate that Raina's affections have become engaged.

By the end of the first act, we know the major secret of the play--that Raina has hidden Bluntschli. Even more important, the personalities of the characters have been established. The audience can expect Bluntschli to continue to behave like a practical man of experience,

⁴For Shaw's discussion of how he uses stage directions, see his essay "How to Make Plays Readable," The Author's Year Book and Guide for 1904 (New York, 1904); rpt. West, pp. 90-95.

Catherine to spout romantic nonsense, and Raina to alternate between the two positions. Comic suspense has been established: we look forward to the characters' further antics and to Raina's realization that she has been won over by Bluntschli.

In the first half of Act II, new characters are introduced, and the secret of the first act periodically threatens to be exposed. At the outset, the pure idealism of Catherine is contrasted by the extreme pragmatism of Nicola. Nicola is clearly content with his condition, but Louka's behavior and her declaration, "You'll never put the soul of a servant into me" indicate that the audience can count on her for action. Louka also reveals that she has some knowledge of Raina's secret. Nicola counsels, "Well, you take my advice, and be respectful; and make the mistress feel that no matter what you know or don't know, they can depend on you to hold your tongue and serve the family faithfully" (p. 26). The audience's knowledge of Louka's character, however, leads us to doubt that she will be so reticent.

The arrival of Petkoff produces another unequivocally ridiculous figure. We laugh with self-assured superiority during the scene between Petkoff and his wife when they bumptiously describe their possessions--the library and the electric bell--and when Petkoff discourses on the dangers of washing. At Sergius's knock, we recall Bluntschli's description of his charge, and even

Petkoff recognizes that the advance was foolhardy. In response to his wife's demand that Sergius be promoted, Petkoff states, "Yes; so that he could throw away whole brigades instead of regiments. It's no use, my dear: he hasn't the slightest chance of promotion until we're quite sure that the peace will be a lasting one" (p. 29). As in the first accounts of Rabbi Busy and Dame Purecraft, the audience's interest in Sergius and its anticipations for his behavior have been quickened in advance.

We are led to expect a melodramatic hero, and we are not disappointed. His first act is to kiss Catherine's hands and to declare grandly, "My dear mother, if I may call you so" (p. 31). Petkoff corrects him matter-of-factly, "Mother-in-law, Sergius: mother--in-law! Sit down and have some coffee." John Mills notes of Sergius's diction,

His persistent substitution of the clichés of rhetorical and poetic contrivance for the words and patterns of ordinary prose discourse, constitutes a deviation from the linguistic norm established by other characters in the play and is laughable in consequence.⁵

This stilted manner of speaking is obvious in Sergius's conversation with Petkoff and Catherine. Of the Slivnitsa battle, he comments, "Madam: it was the cradle and the grave of my military reputation" (p. 32) and, "I won the battle the wrong way while our worthy Russian generals were losing it the right way." Finally he asks, "How is

⁵ Language and Laughter (Tucson, Ariz., 1969), p. 68.

Raina; and where is Raina?" In a Restoration comedy where there is wide-spread verbal sophistication, these sentences would not be notable. But juxtaposed with the informality of Catherine's "How so?" and Petkoff's "Now who could have supposed you were going to do such a thing?" their artificial balance is conspicuous and comical.

After Sergius's introductory remarks, attention is again shifted to the Bluntschli secret when Sergius and Petkoff discuss a Swiss soldier they had encountered in the war. Raina asks with feigned unconcern, "Are there many Swiss officers in the Serbian Army?" Hearing that they had met only one, she questions more anxiously, "What was he like?" Suspense increases as Sergius recounts Bluntschli's story; will Raina or Catherine disclose the truth, or will they both be able to hide their reactions? The tension is happily released with Raina's grand announcement, "Your life in the camp has made you coarse, Sergius. I did not think you would have repeated such a story before me" (p 35). Raina's interest in the accounts of the Swiss soldier, and her refusal to tell Sergius of her tête-à-tête are further clues about her affections.

After Raina leaves, the first real surprise in the play occurs: Sergius immediately makes advances to Louka. Although the audience must be initially taken aback, Sergius analyzes his motivation and his action becomes understandable. First he complains that the "higher love" is a "very fatiguing thing to keep up for any length of

time" (p. 37). Then he admits that his life is a series of poses,

I am surprised at myself, Louka. What would Sergius the hero of Slivnitsa say if he saw me now? What would Sergius, the apostle of higher love, say if he saw me now? What would the half dozen Sergiuses who keep popping in and out of this handsome figure of mine say if they caught us here?

(p. 37)

Louka, as we could anticipate from her earlier conversation with Nicola, reacts to Sergius's advances with a mixture of pride and coquettish interest. She also reveals as much of Raina's secret as she knows, and announces,

. . . I tell you that if that gentleman ever comes here again, Miss Raina will marry him, whether he likes it or not. I know the difference between the sort of manner you and she put on before one another and the real manner.

(p. 39)

The audience should too and thus can expect that, like Raina and Bluntschli, eventually Sergius and Louka will realize their love; more immediately we can look forward to Sergius giving retribution for Louka's hurt. Our anticipations for a happy ending for both couples have been set, but we are unsure when or how Sergius and Raina will abandon their romantic posturing and follow their true emotions.

By this time the audience's attitudes and expectations have been formed about all the characters, and we have more knowledge than any of them. The hierarchy of knowledge within the Petkoff household is significantly the exact opposite of the social hierarchy: Louka is

on the highest plane, knowing all that the audience does except the identity of Raina's soldier-intruder, and Petkoff is at the bottom knowing nothing of the conduct of either Raina or Sergius. The levels of understanding roughly parallel that of information: Louka seems to have the most insight into the behavior of the other characters, and Petkoff is the most obtuse. Of the outsiders, Bluntschli is on our own level of understanding but is unaware of the Sergius-Louka affair. Sergius knows about as much as Louka, but has little more understanding than Petkoff. Some characters are clearly incapable of change--the mere sight of the Petkoffs on stage is pleasurable because we can anticipate their good-natured but bumbling pretenses. On the other hand, we look forward to Raina and Sergius slowly gaining knowledge and awareness.

Now that the audience's attitude toward the major characters has been fixed, the second act concludes with a series of threats that the two secrets will be discovered. First Raina breaks in upon Sergius with the question, "Have you been flirting with Louka?" (p. 40). It is a relief to find that she is just joking since Sergius is clearly unready to recognize, let alone declare his real love. Raina's secret also comes close to being exposed with the arrival of Bluntschli and his detainment by Sergius and Petkoff. Raina's composure momentarily deserts her, and when she first sees Bluntschli, she exclaims,

"Oh! The chocolate cream soldier!" Her mother hastily covers up, only to have her imposture threatened by the arrival of Nicola with Bluntschli's bag. Nicola characteristically takes the blame for the women's blunders, and the act ends with neither secret divulged.

The final act starts with suspense: the audience knows that Louka will not take her hurt with the same passivity with which Nicola accepted Petkoff's outburst and that the forthright Bluntschli is now in the same house with Petkoff and Sergius. We therefore can expect that both stories will soon be revealed. The movement toward disclosure is initially desultory, however, as the play again directs the attention of the audience to characterization. In the scene in the library, the impression that Bluntschli is a practical business man is confirmed and our feeling of superiority over Sergius is reinforced as we witness his trouble in writing.

When Bluntschli and Raina are at last alone together, expectation is built for their romance to advance, and Raina's opening statement is promising, "You look ever so much nicer than when we last met" (p. 52). Here also, however, the advancement of the plot takes a back seat to analysis of personalities and the second surprising revelation is made; Raina realizes that her idealism is a fraud. Once the initial shock has passed, we discover that this admission is not completely incompatible with her earlier characterization. After all,

Raina has always behaved pragmatically and has voiced doubts about the genuineness of the "higher love" she has displayed with Sergius. Like Sergius, she is very explicit about her motivation, saying of her melodramatic posing, "I did it when I was a tiny child to my nurse. She believed in it. I do it before my parents. They believe in it. I do it before Sergius. He believes in it" (p. 54). Bluntschli responds with somewhat surprising gallantry, but his practicality is soon re-asserted with the disclosure that he had never found the picture that Raina had put in his pocket, and that he had in fact pawned the coat. When news comes of his father's death, he directs his attention to the business complications that are entailed, "I shall have to start for home in an hour. He has left a lot of big hotels behind him to be looked after" (pp. 56-57). The exchange between Raina and Bluntschli is thus totally irrelevant to the exigencies of the plot, but the insight it gives the audience of Raina's character makes us more assured of her ultimate alliance with Bluntschli.

The scene between Sergius and Louka advances the story line much more directly. Louka reveals the rest of Raina's secret in response to Sergius's provocation, "She will never marry you now. The man I told you of has come back. She will marry the Swiss" (p. 62). The relationship between Sergius and Louka takes on added depth as well when Sergius announces, "If I choose to love you, I dare marry you, in spite of all Bulgaria."

If these hands ever touch you again, they shall touch my affianced bride" (pp. 62-63). Sergius is coming closer to realizing his true emotions, and the audience can now look forward to his and Louka's affair ending in marriage.

This is the last scene in which important progress is made toward resolution of the plot. Although major secrets are still to be disclosed, their revelation provokes remarkably little reaction, and attention is again directed toward personality. What is said becomes less important than the manner in which it is stated. Sergius's challenge to Bluntschli contributes little to the action of the play since nothing comes of it, but it does confirm our opinion of each character. Sergius delivers the challenge with customary melodrama, "You have deceived me. You are my rival. I brook no rivals. At six o'clock I shall be in the drilling-ground on the Klissoura road, alone, on horse-back, with my sabre" (p. 63). Bluntschli destroys Sergius's romantic vision with typical aplomb, "I'm in the artillery; and I have the choice of weapons. If I go, I shall take a machine gun." The same qualities are demonstrated when Sergius withdraws the challenge. Sergius complains, "I could no more fight with you than I could make love to an ugly woman. Youve no magnetism: youre not a man: youre a machine." Bluntschli readily agrees, "Quite true; quite true. I always was that sort of chap. I'm very sorry" (p. 66).

The disclosure of the two secrets is in both cases

anticlimactic. It turns out that Raina knew all along that Sergius was flirting with Louka, and Petkoff's indignation that Raina had hidden Bluntschli is tempered by the later revelation that Bluntschli owns two hundred horses. The real climax, predictably, concerns personalities and comes with the final surprise that Bluntschli has an "incurably romantic disposition." Some critics have been greatly disturbed by this statement. A. N. Kaul, for example, calls it "a piece of bright but dramatically thin and transparent tissue to cover an embarrassment." He goes on to declare,

The disclosure is found to be mere words not only because it contradicts our picture of Bluntschli as he is dramatically presented up to this minute, but, more important, because it is impossible to see any recognizable content in the assertion.⁶

In fact, Bluntschli's revelation is not altogether inconsistent with what the audience has seen before. As Bluntschli points out, a more practical man would have dived into a cellar and would have mailed the coat back. We can recall moreover his statement of attraction for Raina, "I'm like all the rest of them: the nurse, your parents, Sergius: I'm you infatuated admirer." When Raina had questioned this, he had answered dramatically, "Hand auf Herz! Really and truly" (p. 55). His background is more than just prosaic also--he, not Sergius, is the accomplished sword-fighter. Bluntschli's disclosure, then,

⁶The Action of English Comedy (New Haven, 1970), p. 300.

follows the same pattern as those of Sergius and Raina: we are initially startled, but then can see the truth in the assertion. After Bluntschli's final admission, we just need Raina's confession of her love, and the story ends.

Although Arms and the Man uses a traditional plot, in some ways it differs strikingly from the linear dramas discussed previously. In Shakespeare's three plays and in Volpone, we are interested in the characters gaining true understanding, but suspense arises mostly from when and in what ways announced intentions will be carried out and secrets disclosed. In Arms and the Man, although the audience does wonder how and when Sergius and Raina will discover each other's secret, comic suspense is generated to a greater extent over when and how characters will achieve self-awareness.

The progress toward the happy endings in Shakespeare's plays is also much more halting, with several obstacles to the final reconciliation, some arranged by others and some self-imposed. In Arms and the Man, the characters are completely responsible for what befalls them. Virtually no one stands in the way of the lovers: there are no Don Johns or Polixeneses to block their happiness. As in Volpone and Bartholomew Fair, knowledge brings power and in Shaw's play the central characters are able to gain the insight of the audience and thus to share in our triumph. Once Sergius and Raina become

aware of their true emotions and desire the same outcome as the audience, their wishes and our anticipations are fulfilled. The human will is directed to much less lofty endeavors than in The Birds, but its power to determine events is almost as boundless.

Heartbreak House shares this interest in the power of man over events, but reaches a more complicated conclusion and uses a different method to explore the relationship. Shortly after he had finished work of Heartbreak House, Shaw commented upon his earlier work,

Compare my play Arms and the Man with Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard, and if you do not at once perceive that the Russian play is a novel and delicate picture whilst the pseudo-Bulgarian one is a simple theatrical projection, effected by a bag of the oldest stage tricks, then I shall form a very poor opinion of your taste.⁷

Heartbreak House, Shaw believed, bore a much closer resemblance to the Russian work. In the preface, he notes the debt to Chekhov and Tolstoy, and he subtitles the play "A Fantasia in the Russian Manner." The audience is thus alerted for a new style in Heartbreak House as soon as the program is opened.

In the first scenes we are nevertheless more apt to be struck by similarities to Arms and the Man than by differences. The audience is kept informed of what is going to happen in the usual manner. Captain Shotover identifies himself as the father not only of Hesione

⁷"I Am a Classic But Am I a Shakespear Thief?" Hearst's Magazine, 38 (Sept. 1920). In West, 131-32.

Hushabye but of another daughter who has married a "numskull" and who he shall never see again. Nurse Guinness retorts, "Indeed you never were more mistaken. She is in England this very moment. You have been told three times this week that she is coming home for a year for her health" (p. 33).⁸ The audience's expectations have been set for this daughter's arrival and we are not disappointed, for soon Lady Utterword enters and her characterization makes Captain Shotover's rejection more understandable. She and Ellie are joined shortly by Hesione who outlines what further action the audience can anticipate. She introduces Ellie to her sister, stating, "She is going to marry a perfect hog of a millionaire for the sake of her father who is as poor as a church mouse; and you must help me to stop her" (p. 59). More specifically, she discloses that the two men will be with them soon.

The audience can guess how Shaw will present the businessman, and expectations are also set for Ellie's father as wide-eyed idealist. Hesione explains how he received his name,

Mazzini was a celebrity of some kind who knew Ellie's grandparents. They were both poets, like the Brownings; and when her father came into the world Mazzini said, 'Another soldier born for freedom!' So they christened him Mazzini; and he has been fighting for freedom ever since. That's why he is so poor.
(p. 60)

We look forward to the arrival of the well-intentioned

⁸ Citations are to the Penguin Edition, (Middlesex, 1964), which follows the Constable Edition's text.

but ineffectual father and the disgustingly rich suitor, and to Hesione's attempts to free Ellie from their grasps. Once again our expectations are fulfilled when the two men are portrayed as we expect from Shaw, and Hesione immediately sets about to undermine the match.

In the beginning, then, the characters announce their intentions and the audience can predict the subsequent action. The characters, too, offer few surprises. Nurse Guinness is typical of a long line of insubordinate servants, dating back to Xanthias in Aristophanes's The Frogs. Captain Shotover is strikingly blunt and on occasion makes surprising assertions, as in his identification of Ellie as the daughter of his iniquitous boat-swain. The audience soon comes to expect announcements of this sort from the Captain, however, and his conduct is consistent with his statements. We recognize him as the engaging eccentric so appropriate to the comic world. Lady Utterword is an even more typical figure, at least in Shaw's repertoire, and she bears distinct resemblance to Lady Britomart in Major Barbara. Her original rebuke to Guinness tips off her main concern, "Nurse: will you please remember that I am Lady Utterword, and not Miss Addy, nor lovey, nor darling, nor doty? Do you hear?" (p. 57). From beginning to end she always identifies herself with respectability.

Ellie Dunn is initially portrayed as a stock character as well, and is similar to Raina in the opening

of Arms and the Man. The audience first witnesses her naiveté when she unquestioningly assumes Mangan's benevolence in giving her father money for his business, "I dont mean that he lent it to him, or that he invested it in his business. He just simply made him a present of it. Wasnt that splendid of him?" (p. 63). No businessman in the Shavian world would act with such disinterested generosity.

Ellie's confession of her infatuation with Marcus Darnley reveals the depth of her romanticism, and her discussion with Hesione is like Raina's opening exchange with Bluntschli. First, Ellie expresses her admiration for Othello and his stories. When Hesione suggests that the Moor may have been making up the stories for Desdemona, she counters, "Shakespear would have said if he was. Hesione: there are men who have done wonderful things: men like Othello, only, of course, white, and very handsome" (p. 67). Like Raina, Ellie has apparently fallen for an adventurer-hero. When she recounts how he was discovered as a baby by a French count and his youthful gallantries, Hesione at first thinks she is lying, but the audience should know that Ellie is simply the captive of her romantic daydreams. Hesione finally sees that Ellie is sincere and exclaims, "Pettikins, my pettikins: how I envy you, and how I pity you!" Ellie responds with typical credulity, "Pity me! Oh, why?" (p. 70). We know precisely why and are prepared to witness Ellie's

disillusionment.

The speed with which our expectations are fulfilled, however, is a surprise. Immediately after Ellie's question, a man enters whom she greets as Marcus Darnley, and Hesione announces, "What a lark! He is my husband." We are surprised not only by the identification but by the quickness of Ellie's recovery. After the initial jolt, she exclaims, "Damn!" and then elaborates, "I am not damning him: I am damning myself for being such a fool. How could I let myself be taken in so?" (p. 71). Ellie's disillusionment apparently extends to her fiancé as well; when Hesione asks her, "How do you feel about Boss Mangan now?" she answers, "(disengaging herself with an expression of distaste) Oh, how can you remind me of him Hesione?" Ellie's conversion is complete and she is not upset at seeing Hector now, announcing, "I am quite cured" (p. 72). All the anticipated action has now been completed: Hesione has disrupted Ellie's engagement and Ellie has been divested of her romantic illusions. The expected play has come to a premature end.

Charles Carpenter notes that Shaw frequently picks familiar types of plots to attack his audience's conventional expectations and ideals. Carpenter remarks that Arms and the Man starts as a military melodrama, then challenges the usual illusions about military heroism.⁹

⁹Bernard Shaw and the Art of Destroying Ideals (Madison, Wis., 1969), p. 19.

Elder Olson expands upon this idea, saying of Shaw,

His favorite overall device is something I will call suspense of form . . . it consists in keeping the audience uncertain as to what kind of play they are witnessing: is it comic or serious, farce or tragedy, realism or fantasy?¹⁰

It is questionable whether either comment is completely applicable to Arms and the Man since Raina's romanticism is shown to be at least partly suspect from the beginning. Both are appropriate, however, for Heartbreak House. After settling down to enjoy the standard Shavian attack on romanticism and conventionality, the audience finds its play finished midway through the first act. We are left wondering what sort of spectacle is being enacted.

After Ellie's conversion, linear plotting must be abandoned because the point being made about the characters is precisely that they have no governing purpose. Assorted games and pastimes substitute for any transcendent objective. As in other contextual drama, sustained action stretching through the course of the play is replaced by disconnected episodes, and the audience's attention is shifted from group to group as characters enter and then depart often and abruptly.

Confusion in Heartbreak House is accentuated by the absence of any of the usual forms of comic suspense. In The Birds a point of plot is left unresolved, in Bartholomew Fair new endeavors are promised, before the

¹⁰The Theory of Comedy (Bloomington, Ind., 1968), p. 122. *Italics his.*

focus of the play changes. Even though the audience has no simple story line to follow, suspense is thus maintained because the audience is kept waiting for the outcome of the interrupted action. Shaw does precisely the opposite. He maneuvers each exchange to an impasse before the characters are rescued by a new obtrusion. Shotover has finished his argument against Mangan's marrying Ellie, for example, when Randall suddenly arrives; Mazzini has already resisted Hesione's allure and convinced her that he is concerned about Ellie's welfare, when Ellie enters; Ellie and Shotover have reached their understanding before the appearance of Hector and Randall. The audience is presented with a series of vignettes; when we think back over the play, it is difficult to remember the order in which actions take place. Did Mangan disclose to Ellie the true source of his wealth before or after Lady Utterword and Hector started their flirtation? Did Hector witness Lady Utterword's humiliation of Randall before or after Shotover persuaded Ellie not to marry Mangan? It is difficult to remember because the order doesn't matter. The events are independent, separated in causation as well as time, and concluded before attention shifts. Comic suspense concerning when the desired completion of interrupted action will occur is rendered impossible.

Suspense based upon the audience's superior knowledge is also virtually abandoned. In Arms and the Man, the audience is given information denied some

characters, and we can anticipate the confidences being disclosed. In Heartbreak House, whatever information we receive is soon acquired by the characters. There are no secrets: if nothing else the inhabitants of Heartbreak House are candid and when they uncover a fact or gain an insight, they hurry to tell everyone else. Since the audience has no greater knowledge than the characters, we are as surprised by what occurs as they. In fact, Shaw deliberately ensures that his audience is ignorant of what is going to happen. Hesione gives no clue that Marcus Darnley could be her husband, and we therefore share her and Ellie's astonishment at his identification. We are similarly surprised by Ellie's apparently quite spontaneous hypnotism of Mangan. Shaw briefly exploits our awareness of Mangan's condition when Nurse Guinness stumbles over the prostrate tycoon. She exclaims, "Oh, Missy Hussy, I've been and killed him" and Mazzini asks melodramatically, "What tempted you to commit such a crime, woman?" (p. 68). Both reactions are comical because the audience knows that both are misguided. The true explanation is soon revealed, however, when Mazzini recounts how Ellie had earlier hypnotised him.

How carefully Shaw shuns classical comic suspense based upon superior awareness is illustrated by the fact that the audience, as well as Ellie and Hesione, is convinced that Mangan cannot hear a word of their conversation. Shaw could have easily tipped us off about Mangan's

true state of consciousness so that we could look forward to him confronting the women with their hypocrisy. Instead, we are just surprised as they when Mangan bounds from his chair exclaiming, "Wake up! So you think Ive been asleep, do you?. . . . Ive heard every word youve said, you and your precious father. . ." (pp. 110-11).

The sudden disruption caused by the burglar is equally unanticipated. It is true that Lady Utterword had mentioned her diamonds early in the play (p. 78), but her attention as well as the audience's had been quickly diverted by her recognition of Randall. A playgoer would have to be almost hypersensitive to bear in mind Lady Utterword's casual remark through all the action that precedes the discovery of the burglar. Shaw, of course, could have brought her statement back to mind by having someone mention burglaries in the neighborhood, or showing the characters noting then ignoring some noise upstairs, but he does not. Instead, he piles surprise upon surprise, as we learn first that there is a burglar, then that he is the unregenerate boatswain Captain Shotover had so long identified as Mazzini. We find out that Dunn isn't really a burglar but an extortionist who makes his living by being caught in a robbery and then exacting money from his captors who are reluctant to take him to the police. Finally Shotover asks the Nurse, "Guinness: you remember this man?" and she answers, "I should think I do, seeing I was married to him, the blackguard!" (p. 121).

Our astonishment is as great as that of any of the characters.

Comic suspense concerning when characters will gain the audience's insight is also precluded. After Ellie's initial disillusionment in Act I, the characters, like those in Jonson's plays, show themselves unable to change or develop. Shotover is nearest the audience's level of understanding. He shares our ability to detect the faults of others, and much of the humor in the play comes from his accurate but disparaging assessments. Early in the play, Shotover describes Ariadne,

I have a second daughter who is, thank God, in a remote part of the Empire with her numskull of a husband. As a child she thought the figure-head of my ship, the Dauntless, the most beautiful thing on earth. He resembled it. He had the same expression: wooden yet enterprising.
(p. 53)

Shotover is wrong about where his daughter is, but is proven correct in the appraisal of her personality. He shows similar discernment with the other characters. He sees through Mangan's initial swagger and tells him, "Talk like a man, not like a movy" (p. 75). He advises Hector about his exercises, "That sort of strength is no good. You will never be as strong as a gorilla" (p. 86). Unlike Peregrine or Quarlous, however, Shotover derives no power from his insight. He is too old and disillusioned to try to affect events, and confines himself to relating his vision to others and amusing himself with the invention of destructive weapons.

Of the rest of the characters, Ellie and her father are the only ones who delude themselves, and they are incapable of gaining true understanding. Mazzini fancies himself as a revolutionary, but he is shown to be a slave of conventionality. He speaks in platitudes and is always fearful that someone will believe the Captain's confused identification of him with the rascal Billie Dunn. In the final act, Mazzini is the most complacent of the group, telling the others that they represent, "Surely, if I may say so, rather a favorable specimen of what is best in our English culture" (p. 152). His disagreement with Shotover's ominous predictions is staunchly conservative, ". . . nothing happened, except, of course, the usual poverty and crime and drink that we are used to. Nothing ever does happen. It's amazing how well we get along all things considered" (p. 155). Mazzini is not even an ineffectual reformer like Morell in Candida: he has completely abandoned his principles.

Although Ellie is disillusioned about her original romanticism and dissuaded from a marriage of convenience with Mangan, her "spiritual marriage" with Shotover still does not bring her insight. Rather than gaining the Captain's vision, she seems dangerously close to converting Shotover into a household pet, as dominated by her as Hector is by Hesione. Hector himself remarks, "That's an extraordinary girl. She has the Ancient Mariner on a string like a Pekinese dog" (p. 131). In the final act,

we see her belittling Shotover's insight. After the Captain's magnificent speech describing the smashing of the drunken skipper's ship, she concludes, mistakenly, "Moral: dont take rum" (p. 156). She should know by now that the Captain is talking of more than literal alcohol. Later when he is trying to explain to Hector what should be done to save themselves, she hushes him like a child, "Quiet, quiet: youll tire yourself" (p. 156). When the zeppelins appear, she becomes enraptured by the romanticism of death and destruction, and the final words of the play express her hope that the bombs will be dropped again. Surely Shaw does not want us to share her sentiments.¹¹

There is little suspense as to when the other characters will gain our degree of insight because they are deceiving others more than themselves. The characters are often deceiving the audience as well, and surprise attends their unmasking. Characterization is more complicated than in Arms and the Man because Shaw frequently lulls us into thinking we can assess a character by detecting his hypocrisy, then startles us by showing an entirely new facet of his personality. Hector, for example, tries to project himself as a lady-killer, and early in the play he is exposed as a poseur and a liar.

¹¹For the contrary view that Ellie is a legitimate heroine see, for example, Robert P. Reed, "Boss Mangan, Peer Gynt, and Heartbreak House," ShawR, 2 (Jan. 1959), 6-12.

We think we have taken stock of him, when suddenly it is revealed through his conversation with Hesione that he really has very little interest in romance and the façade is adopted mostly to please his wife.

Similarly, it is not surprising that Lady Utterword is using respectability as a cover for engaging in illicit flirtations. After all, in most of Shaw's plays, respectability is equated with hypocrisy. We are startled to learn, however, that even her respectability is a fraud. Randall tells Hector, "Her conduct is perfectly scandalous. I assure you. . . I havnt an atom of jealousy in my composition; but she makes herself the talk of every place she goes to by her thoughtlessness" (p. 132). The audience might think that the scandal was in Randall's eyes alone had not Ariadne's previous conduct been indecorous. After Ellie had mused about broken hearts, Lady Utterword jumped to her feet and shouted, "How dare you?" (p. 123). Captain Shotover explained that Ariadne was outraged because she has no heart, and then she flung herself on her knees and embraced her father. Hector expressed the general disapproval of this performance by saying, "Lady Utterword: you are not to be trusted. You have made a scene" (p. 124) and then stalked out. The same pattern is followed with Mangan. Knowing Shaw's contempt for business magnates, we are not shocked by Mangan's revelation to Ellie of how he ruthlessly exploited her father. It is a surprise in the final act,

however, to learn that Mangan is not even wealthy, "Of course, I make them keep me going pretty well, but it's a dog's life; and I dont own anything" (p. 143).

In Arms and the Man, the illusions and hypocrisy of the characters are exposed so that their behavior can be altered on the basis of the new appraisals of themselves and of others. In Heartbreak House, exposure does not generate change. When Bluntschli saw through Raina's pose, she dropped her romantic pretensions and behaved naturally with him. No such transformation is effected in the later play: Lady Utterword goes on feigning respectability even though everyone knows it is an act, and Hector continues in his Arab garb although there is no one left to impress. Even attitudes are unchanged: Ellie still loves Hector after she knows him for a liar; Mangan still loves Hesione although he realizes that she is making a fool of him; Lady Utterword and Hector continue their flirtation even though each understands that the other is merely playing. The characters are unable to take action even when they are confronted with new information.

After the opening episode, then, suspense is systematically undercut in Heartbreak House. There is no action to look forward to: each exchange is virtually completed before it is disrupted, and all the major events in the play surprise both the characters and the audience. There is also no suspense about character development--we are given surprising insight into the

personalities of the characters, but they are unable to reform and we cannot anticipate that exposure will change their conduct. Throughout the play, however, an under-current of tension takes the place of the traditional comic suspense.

One of the central themes of Heartbreak House is the question, what constitutes true danger? There are psychological hazards: Captain Shotover worries about losing his dreams; Mazzini is frightened by "gorgeous women"; Hecotr fears passion; and Lady Utterword is alarmed by the Heartbreak House pastime, "Our family habit of throwing stones in all directions and letting the air in is not only unbearably rude, but positively dangerous" (p. 147).

There are physical threats as well. First we learn of Hector's obsession with taking chances, as Hesione tells Ellie, "If you hint the slightest doubt of Hector's courage, he will go straight off and do the most horribly dangerous things. . ." (p. 72). Captain Shotover's dynamite is frequently mentioned, and at one point he even brings it into the house. His money-making schemes are generally destructive; at the end of Act II he is working on a new grapnel cannon. There is risk involved in Ellie's hypnotism of Mangan, as her father recognizes, rebuking her: "But it's dangerous. You know what happened to me" (p. 105). The burglar seems to pose a legitimate danger, at first physical then financial, until he is subdued by Shotover. Each new threat is deflected, but not really

overcome. Hector is still a daredevil; the Captain's dynamite does not explode in the house, but it still rests in the gravel pit; Mangan is not physically hurt by Ellie's hypnotism, but his pride has been wounded; and the burglar has been found out, but is still in the house. The references to danger continue as well, which generates the expectation of further peril.

The characters also tend to speak of themselves and of others in terms of danger and safety. Hector tells Lady Utterword, "You are a dangerous woman" and she demurs, "On the contrary, I am a safe woman" (p. 90). Mazzini characterizes Mangan as "the most helpless of mortals" (p. 102) and himself as "quite safe" (p. 104). Hesione tells Mazzini that Shotover is "quite harmless" (p. 61), but Shotover himself warns Ellie, "Old men are dangerous; it doesn't matter to them what is going to happen to the world" (p. 128). Finally near the end of the play, Hector announces, "We are useless, dangerous, and ought to be abolished" (p. 140). By this time the audience can understand both sides. The characters are "safe" to the extent that they perform little active harm, but their passivity produces an overwhelming danger.

The intimation of threat reaches its peak in the final act when most of the characters are also anticipating catastrophe. Only Mazzini and Lady Utterword do not share in the general gloom, the former trusting in Providence, the latter in her husband's imperialism.

Neither view has any validity. Mangan, on the other hand, has a foreboding that he is about to die, and Hesione has heard a "splendid drumming in the sky," which Hector interprets as "Heaven's threatening growl of disgust at us useless futile creatures" (p. 140). Ellie states, "I'm always expecting something. I don't know what it is; but life must come to a point sometime" (p. 154). The most persistent predictors of doom are Hector and Captain Shotover. Hector announces, "I tell you, one of two things must happen. Either out of that darkness some new creation will come to supplant us as we have supplanted the animals, or the heavens will fall in thunder and destroy us" (p. 140). Later he agrees with Ellie, "We sit here talking and leave everything to Mangan and to chance and to the devil. Think of the powers of destruction that Mangan and his mutual admiration gang wield" (p. 154).

The best speeches belong to Captain Shotover. After describing how nothing happens to the sea, he goes on, "Nothing but the smash of the drunken skipper's ship on the rocks, the splintering of her rotten timbers, the tearing of her rusty plates, the drowning of the crew like rats in a trap" (p. 156). He then becomes more specific, "The captain is in his bunk drinking bottled ditch-water; and the crew is gambling in the forecastle. She will strike and sink and split. Do you think the laws of God will be suspended in favor of England because you were born

in it?" (p. 156). Shotover is right, of course, and although the audience does not know what is going to happen, if we fail to anticipate some kind of retribution we are as misguided as Mazzini and Lady Utterword.

Heartbreak House is a funny play, but it is also an angry one. In fact, most of the humor comes from "put downs," witty but telling insults. Suspense works to underscore this anger. Beneath the jokes, satire, and farcical action, there is an apprehension that something will happen to upset these foolish characters' lives. The conclusion is not dreaded, however, because the audience has been distanced from the characters by our own superior insight. In Volpone, Volpone and Mosca at least realize the cause for their downfall at the end of the action, and Justice Overdo in Bartholomew Fair has seen fit to modify his attitudes by the fair's close. In Shaw's play the characters have learned nothing--at the end of the play they are as lazy and complacent as at the beginning. The characters are powerless, not because circumstances conspire against them, but because they are unwilling to direct any energy to controlling events. The characters' failure does not extend to the audience. We may be surprised by what happens, but we are instructed not to entertain the characters' illusions or share their responses. We feel increasing uneasiness about their frivolous diversions, and the repeated allusions to danger forewarn us that eventually these characters must

face judgment. In this, at least, our expectations are confirmed.

The greatest mastery, however, belongs to the playwright. The inhabitants of Heartbreak House are vapid and impotent, but Shaw is not, as he reveals by periodically showing his control over characters and events. We are often encouraged to see the strings on the marionettes. Shotover's speeches in particular are sometimes strikingly Shavian:

Decent men are like Daniel in the lion's den: their survival is a miracle; and they do not always survive. We live among the Mangans and Randalls and Billie Dunns as they, poor devils, live among the disease germs and the doctors and the lawyers and the parsons and the restaurant chefs and the tradesmen and the servants and all the rest of the parasites and blackmailers.

(p. 87)

Later he advises Ellie against marrying Mangan, "It's prudent to gain the whole world and lose your own soul. But dont forget that your soul sticks to you if you stick to it; but the world has a way of slipping through your fingers" (p. 125). In such remarks, Shotover is clearly Shaw's spokesman.

Shaw's hand is also displayed in the play's surprising events. It is particularly noticeable in the introduction of Billie Dunn. This episode has been called a "structural blemish" because it has nothing to do with the theme of heartbreak¹² and Shaw defended it on the

¹²Frederick P. W. McDowell, "Technique, Symbol, and Theme in Heartbreak House," PMLA, 68 (1953), p. 336.

dramatically irrelevant grounds of economic and social accuracy. The presentation of the burglar might better be seen as a display of virtuosity by Shaw where all pretenses of plausibility are abandoned, as the playwright demonstrates how he can twist the plot as he pleases. It is a modern-day equivalent of the Old Comedy tradition of having a player representing the dramatist appear on stage to draw attention to his control of the play and demand recognition of his skill. Heartbreak House therefore, still demonstrates human power. The characters fail because they make no effort to direct events: they are content, as Shotover says, to drift. The playwright is not, though, and his control over his work is evidence of the command that can be exercised by human will. The audience also should be alerted by the frequent references to danger, not to share the characters' complacency and thus their defeat.

CHAPTER VI

THE CHERRY ORCHARD: SUSPENSE FROM PASSIVITY

The discussion of The Cherry Orchard has been kept for last although it was written and performed before Heartbreak House because Shaw's play in many ways has greater similarity to Jonson's Bartholomew Fair than to later drama. The Cherry Orchard, especially in the ambivalence toward the characters and the attention to our own reactions that it demands from the audience, developed techniques that proved more fruitful to later twentieth century playwrights than Shaw's didacticism.

As in the other contextual dramas already studied, there is little progression or sustained action in The Cherry Orchard. We realize early in the play that eventually the estate must be sold, but Lopakhin is the only one who allows himself to be mindful of the auction, and our attention is forced to follow the concerns of the other characters. The action again must be disconnected as one group supersedes another on center stage, and each is preoccupied with its own interests. This absence of a strong story line in Chekhov's plays was initially regarded by many as a flaw of dramaturgy. Even Stanislavsky at first found Chekhov's work impossible to act and had to be convinced by Nemirovitch-Dantchenko to produce The Seagull. Critics too were often put off; D. S. Mirsky was typical when he stated reprovingly,

". . . there is no subject matter in Čekhov's plays, no plot, no action. They are, in fact, the most undramatic plays in the world (If, however, they are not surpassed in this respect by Čekhov's bad--they were all bad--imitators)."¹ Mirsky's opinion has become increasingly less popular, however, largely because of the recognition that, as Rosenberg points out about modern drama, the pattern of Chekhov's plays follows the pattern of our own lives more closely than does that of traditional linear drama.²

Chekhov himself insisted that art must present life as ordinary people experience it. Kuprin reported Chekhov's admonition,

Why write that a person gets into a submarine and goes to the North Pole to seek some sort of reconciliation with humanity, while at the same time the woman he loves hurls herself from a belfry with a theatrical shriek? All this is untrue and does not happen in real life. One must write simply--about how Pyotr Semyonovich got married to Mariya Ivanovna, that's all.³

Chekhov was equally emphatic that the manner of writing be no more exaggerated than the events. He stated in a letter,

After all, in real life, people don't spend every minute shooting at each other, hanging themselves and making confessions of love. They don't spend

¹A History of Russian Literature, ed. Francis J. Whitefield. Rev. ed. (1949; rpt. New York, 1960), p. 365.

²This is noted, for example, by A. Skaftymov, "Principles of Structure in Chekhov's plays," in Robert L. Jackson, ed. Chekhov: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1967), 69-88.

³As quoted in Ronald Hingley, Chekhov: A Biographical and Critical Study (New York, 1966), p. 203.

all the time saying clever things. They're more occupied with eating, drinking, flirting and talking stupidities--and these are the things which ought to be shown on stage. . . . Let everything on the stage be just as complicated, and at the same time just as simple as it is in life.⁴

Life as we experience it does not resolve itself into a single overwhelming problem which flows through us and others until it eventually builds to a crisis which entails either resolution or destruction. Instead, most people act and speak on the basis of their whims at the moment, frequently at cross-purposes with others, without causing great benefit or great harm. Honesty thus compelled Chekhov to the contextual plot.

In order to create an underlying tension to tie the various episodes together, Chekhov employs some of the same techniques as Jonson and Shaw. It was noted previously how the comedy of Volpone depends upon misplaced expectations: we watch how easily both the legacy-hunters and Sir Politic are beguiled because their concern for the future obscures their judgment about the present. The structure of The Cherry Orchard is also built in part upon ungrounded expectations. Surely Lopakhin should realize that it is useless to try to persuade Lyubov and Gayev to subdivide their estate, and the owners are equally misguided in trusting that the cherry orchard will remain theirs even though they make no effort to raise funds to pay their debt. Lyubov and Gayev in fact represent just

⁴Ibid., p. 233.

the opposite failing from that of the legacy-hunters and Sir Politic--the characters in Jonson's play see the present only in terms of its effect on the future, while Mme. Ranevsky and her brother are unwilling to perceive that current actions have any impact upon later events.

Expectations are so often frustrated in Chekhov's drama that Leon Shestov was led to assert,

He is constantly, as it were, on ambush, to watch and waylay human hopes. He will not miss a single one of them, not one of them will escape its fate . . . Tchekhov has only to touch them and they instantly wither and die. And Tchekhov himself, faded, withered and died before our eyes. Only his wonderful art did not die--his art to kill by a mere touch, a breath, a glance, everything whereby men live and wherein they take their pride.⁵

What Shestov fails to take into account, however, is that Chekhov only quashes those expectations which are either built upon misassessments (as in Lopakhin's case), or which are not more than idyllic daydreams. The audience's anticipations are fulfilled.

Expectations of the characters in The Cherry Orchard are even more important than in Volpone because in Chekhov's play no point of plot is left unresolved at the end of an episode. Volpone and Mosca are always shown in the process of formulating a new scheme before an interruption occurs, so the audience can look forward to seeing the action completed. Chekhov's characters,

⁵"Creation from the Void," in Penultimate Words and Other Essays (1916; rpt. Freeport, N.Y., 1966), pp. 6-7.

like Shaw's, are unable to formulate plans in advance, and expectations are all that can carry over from one episode to another. We saw in Much Ado how groups were presented in such a way that we overhear plans which are unknown to another set of characters. In The Cherry Orchard the characters have no secrets from each other, but their revelations give the audience new insights which allow us to view their expectations and either share or discredit them.

Although Chekhov is skillful in foreshadowing events, his artistry is most apparent in his portrayal of characters. In linear drama the audience can react equivocally to a character because we know that during the course of events he will either be reformed or exposed. Thus we can be charmed by Beatrice and Benedick at the beginning of Much Ado while recognizing their immaturity because we can guess that eventually they will grow up. Similarly, our condemnation of Volpone is tempered by some admiration of his performance because we are aware that he is gradually ensnaring himself and will be caught. In contextual plots, on the other hand, where events aren't all tied to a single purpose, static characters generally give the plot unity. In all the non-linear plots studied so far, the link between episodes, and the humor, are contingent upon the predictability of the characters' behavior. We would not be able to laugh at the dithyrambic poet if we thought he had a chance of

outwitting Peisthetaerus; Wasp's attempts to govern his charge are funny because we know that Cokes by nature is incapable of keeping his money; and Shotover's cryptic remarks are more effective because the audience soon becomes prepared for him to say something amusing.

Since the characters in a contextual plot are predictable, they usually elicit an unequivocal response. In The Birds the audience is initially forced to take a double view of Euelpides and Peisthetaerus--we are engaged by their wit and honesty while simultaneously laughing at their cowardice. Euelpides disappears, however, soon after the chorus has been convinced to establish the kingdom of the birds, and we are increasingly distanced from his former companion. The action is so deliberately incredible and Peisthetaerus has such complete power to deflect all threats and rid himself of all annoyances, that it is impossible to respond to him with anything but awe. If the characters in The Birds are too far above us to evoke sympathy, quite the opposite is true of those in Bartholomew Fair and Heartbreak House. It is requisite to the humor of both these plays that we react to the personalities with dispassion, and usually with distaste.

The Cherry Orchard prefigures much of later contextual drama in showing characters who are both predictable and complex. Chekhov was criticized, in fact, for not making his characters embody a moral lesson.

He responded to Suvorin,

You abuse me for objectivity, calling it indifference to good and evil, lack of ideals and ideas, and so on. You would have me, when I describe horse-thieves, say 'Stealing horses is an evil.' But that has been known for ages without my saying so. Let the jury judge them, it's my job simply to show what sort of people they are. . . . Of course it would be pleasant to combine art with a sermon, but for me personally, it is extremely difficult and almost impossible owing to the conditions of technique. You see to depict horse-thieves in seven hundred lines I must all the time speak and think in their tone and feel in their spirit.⁶

In the theater too, Chekhov makes the audience "feel in the spirit" of the characters. Their actions and reactions are rarely startling but we are prohibited from stereotyping them.

Mangan in Heartbreak House is, as Hesione states, "a Boss not a man": Shaw has no qualms about killing him off at the end of the action, and the audience feels no regret at his demise. Lopakhin in Chekhov's play is as eager as Mangan to be financially successful, but Chekhov is careful to make sure that we understand the reason for Lopakhin's concern with money, and that we see that being wealthy has not made him unfeeling. Similarly, Lady Utterword is totally ridiculous in her devotion to respectability and her naive confidence that nothing can go amiss with the government in the hands of people like her husband. There is a charm about Lyubov's

⁶1 April 1890 Letters on the Short Story, the Drama, and Other Literary Topics, ed. Louis S. Friedland (New York, 1966), p. 64.

respectability, on the other hand, and her trust that all will work out well evokes more pity than contempt.

Even Pishchik, the most comical of the characters in The Cherry Orchard, has a moment in Act IV when he is genuinely moving. He is stunned to realize that in his excitement over his own good fortune, he has failed to notice that Lyubov is on the verge of leaving her estate, and stammers out,

No matter. . . .No matter. I wish you all the best.
May God help you. . . .No matter. Everything in this
world comes to an end. (Kisses Mrs. Ranevsky's hand.)
When you hear that my end has come, remember the--er
--old horse and say: Once there lived a man called
Simeonov-Pishchik; may he rest in peace. (p. 239)⁷

The audience suddenly recognizes that beneath the clowning, Pishchik has real feelings after all.

The audience must take this double view of all the characters in The Cherry Orchard: none is so sympathetic that he is not sometimes ridiculous, and none is so comical that we cannot on occasion share his feelings.⁸ Suspense and comedy in the play are dependent upon the audience seeing ramifications of conduct which the characters choose to ignore, and at the same time participating in the governing emotion of each act.

⁷Citations from The Cherry Orchard are to David Magarshack's translation, Anton Chekhov: Four Plays (New York, 1969). The dots indicate pauses rather than ellipses.

⁸J. L. Styan is one of the few critics who has noted this double perspective. I am especially indebted to his article, "The Delicate Balance: Ambivalence in the Comedy of Shakespeare and Chekhov," Costerus, 2 (1972), 159-84.

The short time just before the start of any play is a period of natural excitement and suspense for the audience as we wait for the curtain to go up and wonder if we will enjoy this particular production of this particular play. In The Cherry Orchard, Chekhov is able to sustain these emotions through most of the first act by presenting characters who are themselves nervously expectant. The stage is empty until Lopakhin and Dunyasha bustle in. Their moods parallel what the audience has just experienced: for them too "something is about to happen" and their anticipation is keen.⁹ Their concentration is so fixed upon listening for noise of the owners' arrival that neither pays much heed to what the other says or to Yepikhodov's complaints when he comes in with flowers. The character's focus of attention becomes infectious and the audience too is soon sensitive to possible sounds off-stage as we await Lyubov's arrival.

Meanwhile, the audience is given important insight into the three characters. Yepikhodov is accident-prone and given to a strange manner of speaking. As Dunyasha states, ". . . sometimes he starts talking and you can't understand a word he says. It sounds all right and it's ever so moving, only you can't make head or tail of it" (p. 191). We can guess that his courtship of Dunyasha is

⁹ David Magarshack makes a similar point about the excitement of Konstantin in the opening of The Seagull and of Voynitsky in the opening of Uncle Vanya. See Chekhov, the Dramatist (London, 1952), p. 163.

doomed since she fancies herself as a lady and is concerned that Yepikhodov lacks sophistication. Lopakhin's complete lack of pretense stands out against the affectations of the two servants. He remarks with engaging candor, "I'm a rich man now, rolling in money. But, come to think of it, I'm a plain peasant still. . . .(Turns the pages of his book.) Been reading this book and haven't understood a word. Fell asleep reading it" (pp. 189-90). His remembrance of Mme. Ranevsky's early kindness puts her in a favorable light, and the disclosure that she has been abroad for five years heightens interest in her homecoming.

The tension for both the characters and the audience intensifies in the interval between the carriages' arrival and the appearance of Lyubov:

Lopakhin. (listens) I think I can hear them coming.
 Dunyasha. They're coming! Goodness, I don't know what's the matter with me. I've gone cold all over.
 Lopakhin. Yes, they are coming all right. Let's go and meet them. Will she recognize me?
 We haven't seen each other for five years.
 Dunyasha. (agitated) I'm going to faint. Oh dear, I'm going to faint!

(p. 191)

We ~~presume~~ that Dunyasha isn't really about to faint, she is merely indulging in characteristic self-dramatization, but we can share her anxiety for Mme. Ranevsky's entrance. Suspense builds when we hear noise in the adjoining room and when instead of Lyubov's appearance we are greeted by the old servant Firs who hobbles across the length of the stage muttering unintelligibly. When Lyubov does finally enter with her entourage, she responds with predict-

able sentimentality to her old house. Her companions say very little but each comment is revealing--Varya is in charge of the household; Anya is concerned about introducing her mother to the old estate; Gayev sputters ineffectually; and Charlotte makes bizarre remarks. Mme. Ranevsky is still eager to see the rest of the old home and she proceeds through the room, picking up Lopakhin and dropping off Anya.

From this point until the end of the act, our attention is no longer directed to a single anticipation, but suspense is still generated by the nervous excitement of the characters, and by the characters' and the audience's expectations. There are periods of quiescence but there is tension throughout, and the lulls are only resting points between outbursts of feeling and animated exchanges. The only ones whose moods remain fairly consistent through the act are Lopakhin and Dunyasha who are almost always in a state of agitation, and Pishchik who is continually in high spirits. Suspense is heightened because there is always a character on stage who is awaiting something.

After Mme. Ranevsky's exit, Dunyasha is shown to be all atwitter to tell Anya of Yepikhodov's proposal. Anya is completely uninterested in Dunyasha's disclosure, but she responds with sudden excitement to the maid's casual remark that "Mr. Trofimov" arrived the day before yesterday. The audience doesn't even know who this is, but his proximity and Anya's reaction lead us to expect

the development of a romance.

Anya's energy subsides in the subsequent exchange with Varya as she recalls her depressing journey to Paris, but Varya quickens our interest by revealing that the estate is to be sold in August, and that although all assume that she will be married to Lopakhin, he still has not proposed. The fact that Varya and Lopakhin are attracted to each other adds new insight into their personalities. As Chekhov wrote to Stanislavsky, in fear that his businessman might turn into a caricature,

Lopakhin is a merchant, of course, but he is a very decent person in every sense . . . you must remember that Varya, a serious and religious girl, is in love with Lopakhin; she wouldn't be in love with a mere money-grubber.¹⁰

From now on there will always be additional tension whenever Varya and Lopakhin are on stage together as Varya and the audience wonder if he will use the occasion to propose. Yasha rekindles Dunyasha's agitation by kissing her, and in so doing increases to three the number of incomplete love affairs that the characters and the audience look forward to developing further.

When Mme. Ranevsky re-enters accompanied by Gayev and Lopakhin, our attitude toward her has already deepened. The audience knows that Lyubov is an unrealistic spendthrift and that her and Gayev's profligacy have caused the estate to be scheduled for auction. Even her faults, however, are a result of her tenderheartedness,

¹⁰20 Oct. 1903. Friedland, ed. p. 159.

and it is difficult not to sympathize with one who has so much sympathy for others. Suspense builds in the scene despite the aimless conversation and Lyubov's and Gayev's sentimental reminiscences, because of Lopakhin's obvious agitation as he awaits the proper moment to break in. The audience can see that he is eager to disclose something, but doesn't know what it is he will reveal. Finally Lopakhin bursts out what has been on his mind,

I'd like to say something very nice and cheerful to you. (Glances at his watch.) I shall have to go in a moment and there isn't much time to talk. As you know, your cherry orchard's being sold to pay your debts. The auction is on the twenty-second of August. But there's no need to worry, my dear. You can sleep soundly. There's a way out.
(p. 197)

Lopakhin is so pleased with his plan that he doesn't even notice at first that it is not being received as he had expected. Instead of responding with relief, Gayev is indignant and Mme. Ranevsky stops paying any attention to him. Eventually Lopakhin realizes he is not making an impact and stops talking although he still has confidence in his clever idea.

From this point on the most consistent tension comes from Lyubov, Gayev, and especially Varya, who are waiting for Lopakhin and Pishchik to leave. No one character dominates the conversation, and idle talk, in which nobody has much to say, alternates with surprising liveliness. First Pishchik, then Mme. Ranevsky become animated and near the end of the act it is Gayev's turn to become suddenly ebullient. He has not found any scheme

to save the orchard, he has just decided that the auction will not be held. He pops another gum drop into his mouth and declares,

I give you my word of honor, I swear by anything you like, the estate will not be sold! (Excitedly.) Why, I'll stake my life on it! Here's my hand; call me a rotten scoundrel if I allow the auction to take place. I stake my life on it!

(p. 205)

His words are strangely reassuring to Anya and Varya who depart for bed, their spirits lifted. The act ends with Trofimov's exclamation on seeing Anya, "My sun! My spring!" We had not seen Trofimov and Anya together, and Trofimov's emotional interjection provides the audience with the necessary assurance that Anya's affection will be returned.

In Act I, then, the prevailing mood is one of excitement, shared by both the characters and the audience. Once Lyubov and Gayev have arrived at the estate, there is no single anticipation uniting the characters, but the stage is rarely free of someone who is nervously expectant. The initial tension is thus transmitted from character to character throughout the act. By the end of Act I, the audience has become engaged with the personalities of the characters and can predict their future behavior. Gayev will periodically have an outburst of speechifying, then will attempt to cover his embarrassment with billiard jargon; Lyubov will continue to feel for everyone and to spend money foolishly; Firs will continue to mutter incomprehensibly to himself; and Varya will oversee all the action through tears. Comic suspense

has also been established: the audience looks forward to the reappearance of favorite characters and the development of the romances.

Suspense in the first act is derived from the audience sharing the excitement and anticipation of the characters; in Act II we are expecting movement from anticipated to real action, and must share the characters' irritation when this does not happen. There are no events in the act, the only new information given is that Gayev has acquired a job in the bank, and there are no surprising changes in emotion. In Volpone, the episode with Lady Would-Be in Act III causes suspense by imposing inactivity when we want to see the anticipated action completed. The same tension is generated here, only heightened by having the inactivity stretch out for an entire act. We hope to see Trofimov, Lopakhin, and Yasha move to advance their love affairs, and Lyubov and Gayev wrestle with the problem of their debts, but the characters perversely refuse to do any of these things.

It was noted how every exchange in Heartbreak House is moved to an impasse before the characters are rescued by a new interruption. In the second act of The Cherry Orchard, the characters are at an impasse from the beginning. Irving Deer remarks on the substitution of conversation for action, saying of Chekhov's dialogue that it is,

a perfect means of making objective the constant struggle his characters have between their desire

to act realistically in order to solve their problems and their desire to daydream in one form or another in order to avoid their problems. But because talk gives them both a way of struggling and a way of avoiding struggle, they allow it to divert them from saving the Orchard.¹¹

The lovers are similarly diverted from taking action. Although Trofimov states that they should all be quiet (p. 215), and Gayev says that he will be (p. 216), in Act II the characters are content to talk.

Furthermore, although the act is composed almost exclusively of talk, there is very little true conversation: the characters either makes speeches to inattentive listeners or talk past one another. This was also partly the case in Act I: no one pays much heed as Gayev makes his sentimental address to the bookcase or when Lopakhin holds forth at length about his plan, and at other times the conversation becomes disjointed. Generally, however, all participate in the enthusiasm of Lyubov's return, and since the characters have been separated for several years they are more likely to listen to what the others have to say. In Act II this interest and enthusiasm have vanished and the characters seem to have heard far too much from their companions. Trofimov states at one time, "We talked a lot yesterday, but we didn't arrive at any conclusion" (p. 214). His comment would be an adequate summation of this day's activity as well.

The act opens promisingly with the young servants

¹¹"Speech as Action in Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard," ETJ, 10 (1958), p. 34.

and we can anticipate more bizarre but amusing behavior by Charlotte in addition to resolution of the Yepikhodov-Dunyasha-Yasha love triangle. Instead, the characters are dispirited and fractious, and the behavior of each forces us to understand why he or she is rejected by others. We feel sorry for Charlotte, but she is faintly absurd as she describes her loneliness while chomping on a cucumber and adjusting the buckle for her shotgun. Yepikhodov is even more ridiculous--although his unhappiness is genuine, his manner of expressing it is so stylized that he precludes pity. Dunyasha's love is overpowered by her silliness, as is demonstrated in her mincing speech, "I've become so nervous, so sensitive, so like a lady. I'm afraid of everything. I'm simply terrified. So if you deceived me, Yasha, I don't know what would happen to my nerves" (p. 209). Yasha is the most provoking as, rather than engaging in courtship, he appears more interested in his cigar than his lady. He kisses Dunyasha, but tells her between yawns, "You see, in my opinion, if a girl's in love with somebody, it means she's immoral" (p. 209). The audience's expectations for this set of characters are at least temporarily frustrated.

The servants try to hide their irritation at one another under a thin veneer of civility. The ill feelings are even closer to the surface in the exchange among Mme. Ranevsky, Lopakhin, and Gayev. All of them realize that time is passing with nothing being done to save the

orchard, and each at some time takes out his anger in personal attack on others. Lyubov, who was so warm-hearted in Act I, is the first to become belligerent, telling her brother, "That disgusting restaurant of yours with its stupid band, and those tablecloths smelling of soap. Why did you have to drink so much, Leonid? Or eat so much? Or talk so much?" (p. 210). Later her temper flares at Lopakhin, who has innocently remarked that he had seen a funny play. She rejoins, "I don't suppose it was amusing at all. You shouldn't be watching plays, but should be watching yourselves more often. What dull lives you live. What nonsense you talk" (p. 212).

Lopakhin controls his outrage at Lyubov, but cannot refrain from expressing his vexation to Gayev. After proposing his plan for the third time and having it summarily dismissed, he explodes,

Lopakhin. I shall burst into tears or scream or have
a fit. I can't stand it. You've worn me
out! (To Gayev.) You're a silly old woman!
Gayev. I beg your pardon?
Lopakhin. A silly old woman!

(p. 211)

Gayev cannot keep up the exchange of insults with his sister or Lopakhin, but he directs his anger at Yasha (p. 210), and at Firs (p. 213). Lyubov hopes for some diversion with the arrival of Trofimov, Anya, and Varya, but instead there is bitterness from the start:

Lopakhin. Our eternal student is always walking about
with the young ladies.
Trofimov. Mind your own business.
Lopakhin. He's nearly fifty and he's still a student.
Trofimov. Do drop your idiotic jokes.

Lopakhin. (Laughs.) Tell me, what do you think of me?
 Trofimov. Simply this: You're a rich man and you'll soon be a millionaire. Now, just as a beast of prey devours everything in its path and so helps to preserve the balance of nature, so you, too perform a similar function.

(p. 214)

Although everyone laughs at Trofimov's comparison, it is intentionally cruel.

Even Varya who did nothing but weep in Act I loses her temper in Act II, becoming angry at her mother both for her continual teasing about getting married and for giving gold to the tramp. The appearance of this beggar is the only surprise of the act, but the responses this Pinteresque character elicits are predictable. Varya is frightened, Lopakhin treats the intruder with contempt, and Lyubov gives him her gold. Surprise in Act I resulted from a character's excitement which would suddenly spread to other characters and to the audience as well. In Act II, the only surprise provokes increased exasperation.

When Lyubov, Gayev, Lopakhin, and Varya finally depart, the audience shares their irritation. It was understandable that Lyubov did not want to discuss the sale of her estate on the very day she returned home, but now her refusal to consider Lopakhin's plan or to formulate one of her own, is both unrealistic and contrary. Lopakhin, who is annoyed by the passivity of Lyubov and Gayev, refuses to take any action himself on proposing

to Varya, despite Mme. Ranevsky's endless prodding.

Trofimov and Anya are left alone, but Trofimov soon shows himself to be almost as uninclined to romantic pursuits as Yasha was. He starts off berating Varya, "With her narrow mind she cannot grasp that we are above love. The whole aim and meaning of our life is to bypass everything that is petty and illusory and keeps us from being free and happy" (p. 218). When Anya tries to become personal, asking, "What have you done to me, Peter?" he launches into a declamation on the evils of the leisure class. Anya appears quite taken in by the speeches, but the audience must be increasingly nettled by Trofimov's rejection of intimacy and his extolment of the virtues of work while shunning all labor himself. The first act closed with Trofimov's enraptured exclamation at seeing Anya, this ends with his irritation at Varya's attempt to chaperone them.

There has been much discussion of what the sound of the breaking string occurring mid-way through the act "symbolizes."¹² It is at least an appropriate representation of the mood in Act II--tension is built to such a degree that it snaps. As the hoopoe recognized in The Birds, "We must be up and doing!" The characters are tense and on edge throughout this act, and their passivity

¹²See for example, A. G. Cross, "The Breaking Strings of Chekhov and Turgenev," SEER, 47 (1970), 510-13, and Martin Nag, "On the Aspects of Time and Place in Anton Chekhov's Dramaturgy," Scando-Slavica, 16 (1970), 23-33.

soon lures the audience into sharing these emotions. We desire action being taken on the basis of the insight provided in Act I, and instead we find our expectations thwarted as the characters stubbornly refuse to act in their own interest.

In Act I, the audience was able to sympathize with most of the characters and was swept up by their enthusiasm; in Act II, tension boiled over into outbursts of temper, and we were forced to recognize the element of truth in the insults, as the characters were exasperatingly inactive. Act III combines the enthusiasm with the tension of the previous acts and insists upon even greater audience ambivalence toward the characters.

A more appropriate environment for comedy is established at the beginning as the act opens with a lively dance, and Pishchik's presence assures some fun. This most good-natured of all the characters does not disappoint us either. He narrates a joke about his ancestry, "My father, may he rest in peace, liked his little joke, and speaking about our family pedigree, he used to say that the ancient line of the Simeonov-Pishchiks came from the horse that Caligula had made a senator" (p. 220). He goes on to muse, "Well, a horse is a good beast. You can sell a horse" (p. 220). Beneath the good humor an underlying tension is still detectable--Varya is snappish and Lyubov is distracted. After a period of uncertainty, the audience learns that this is the day of the auction

and Gayev has not yet returned from town with news of what has happened. Once again the characters' mood is infectious and the audience feels suspense: although we surmise that it would be impossible for Gayev to be able to buy the estate, we have enough sympathy for Lyubov that we wish the orchard could somehow be saved. At the same time Chekhov makes certain that the suspense is appropriate to comedy and that we do not share Lyubov's expressed belief that the sale will bring about her destruction. Lyubov states melodramatically, "Life has no meaning for me without the cherry orchard, and if it has to be sold, then let me be sold with it" (p. 224), but almost immediately after, she confides that no matter what the outcome of the auction she will return to her lover in Paris.

In other ways too the audience is assured that though danger will threaten, there will be no real calamity. The periods of greatest tension are followed, therefore, by the most farcical humor and surprising deflations. A spat between Trofimov and Varya evolves into a major quarrel between Mme. Ranevsky and Trofimov. The exchange is especially painful because each is using the truth to hurt the other. Trofimov tells Lyubov of her lover, "Why, he's a scoundrel, and you're the only one who doesn't seem to know it. He's a petty scoundrel, a nonentity" (p. 225). She responds angrily, "You ought to be a man. A person of your age ought to understand people who are in

in love. . . .Yes! Yes! And you're not so pure either. You're just a prude, a ridiculous crank, a freak!" (p. 226). Trofimov, scandalized, leaves the room, but the tension is reduced somewhat when he must return to make his pronouncement, "All is at an end between us!" The next minute everyone is laughing as he falls downstairs and soon he is dancing with Lyubov, completely at peace with her again.

Daniel Gerould remarks of Trofimov's reconciliation, "There could be no better illustration of the way in which comic characters bounce back and go on in their old unthinking manner, quite unchanged by what has happened."¹³ Gerould overstates his case somewhat since none of the characters in The Cherry Orchard can be correctly categorized as "unthinking," but he is right to insist upon their resilience. No matter how cruel the remarks, no lasting offence results from any of the quarrels. The characters' propensity for avoiding danger is given physical representation later when Varya, swinging a stick at a person she imagines to be the unlucky Yepikhodov, narrowly misses hitting Lopakhin instead. They are both initially angry, but just as there has been no physical hurt, no harm has been done to their affections either.

In the opening of Act I, all attention was directed to Mme. Ranevsky's arrival; now all interest centers on

¹³"The Cherry Orchard as a Comedy," JGE, 11 (1958), p. 21.

the arrival of Lopakhin and news of the auction. Suspense is once again heightened: this time Gayev causes the delay Firs had provided earlier. Finally Lopakhin makes the surprising announcement that he has bought the estate. At this point when the audience might easily turn against Lopakhin, Chekhov carefully presents the reasons for his purchase before we witness the results. Lopakhin is so excited that the words come out all in one breath,

If my father and grandfather were to rise from their graves and see what's happened, see how their Yermolay, their beaten and half-literate Yermolay, Yermolay who used to run around barefoot in winter, see how that same Yermolay bought this estate, the most beautiful estate in the world! I've bought the estate where my father and grandfather were slaves, where they weren't even allowed inside the kitchen.

(p. 231)

The audience must feel sorry for Lyubov while at the same time understanding Lopakhin's glee. Lest we get too carried away with Lopakhin's own vision of himself as country squire, his boorishness is immediately shown when he trips over a table and states, "I can pay for everything!" (p. 232). The comfort Anya provides her mother at the end of the act, on the other hand, prevents Lyubov from emerging as an isolated, tragic figure.

In Act I the audience was moved with the various anticipations of the characters, in Act II both the audience and characters were kept waiting for actions which never took place, and Act III was dominated by waiting for news of the auction. Suspense is also built in Act IV by waiting. After the cherry orchard has been sold, after

the relationships have developed as far as they can, we still know that there must be one more action--the characters must leave. Lopakhin has stated matter-of-factly near the beginning, "I say, don't forget the train leaves in forty-seven minutes. In twenty minutes we must start for the station" (p. 234). Characters announce throughout the act, "It's time to leave нора ехать"¹⁴--first Trofimov, then Varya, then Mme. Ranevsky, and finally Trofimov again. Time is viewed from a double perspective: compared to the many years spent at the estate there is little time left but, as most of us experience at leave-takings, compared to the small number of things to do, there is too much time before the departure.

In addition to suspense about the characters' departure, there is the anticipation of Lopakhin's proposal. The audience and the characters have been expecting Lopakhin to take some action since the opening scene, and this anticipation quickens in the last act as the minutes tick away without Lopakhin making any moves toward Varya. Finally Lyubov confronts Lopakhin directly, and he agrees to propose. The audience knows of this agreement, and suspense builds during the discussion between Varya and Lopakhin as he misses opportunity after opportunity to ask the important question. Eventually he runs out of the room: Lopakhin's feelings toward Varya are

¹⁴ Chekhov repeatedly uses these same two words and there seems no reason to translate them in various ways.

too mixed to allow him to take such an unequivocal step.

This ambivalence becomes the prevalent mood in Act IV. The audience could understand both viewpoints of Lopakhin's plan before--he was right that the owners had to do something to save their estate and no better idea was offered, but we also experienced Gayev's and Lyubov's repugnance at tearing down all that made the estate beautiful in order to cram the land with summer cottages. The sale of the orchard also elicits mixed responses from the characters: Yasha is happy to be returning to Paris, while Dunyasha weeps; Gayev and Lyubov lament the end of the old way of life, but Anya and Trofimov rejoice at the start of the new.

The characters themselves share in the mood of the audience and most of them are ambivalent too. When Charlotte enters, Gayev comments, "Happy Charlotte! She's singing." Charlotte is happy to be leaving but is also worried about where she will go. The greatest conflict of feeling about the departure is experienced by Gayev and Lyubov. Gayev expresses his relief that the tension has finally been broken, saying, "Everything's all right now. We were all so worried and upset before the cherry orchard was sold, but now, when everything has finally and irrevocably, settled, we have all calmed down and even cheered up." (pp. 237-38). Lyubov agrees, adding, "Yes, my nerves are better, that's true. I sleep well" (p. 238). When left alone, however, they are overcome by sorrow and fall

into each other's arms in tears. It is important that the audience realizes that both emotions are genuine-- they are honestly heartsick that the estate has been sold, and at the same time they are glad that the worry is finally over.

Characters also feel ambivalent toward each other. In Act I the characters overlooked each other's faults, in Act II they pointed them out vituperatively. Act IV resembles Act II in its absence of events and the predominance of talk. The mood is gentler, and though the characters are as blunt in saying what is on their minds as they had been previously, their opinions have softened. Even Yasha's criticism of the commoners is mixed, "In my opinion, sir, the peasants are decent enough fellows, but they don't understand a lot" (p. 233). Trofimov and Lopakhin exchange the old insults about money-making and schooling, but Trofimov interrupts suddenly, "Still, I like you in spite of everything. You've got fine sensitive fingers, like an artist's, and you have a fine sensitive soul" (p. 235). Lopakhin responds with an embrace, and although the two adversaries still believe their old criticisms of each other, they part friends. Now that the auction is over and nothing can be changed, both the characters and the audience can be more charitable in their attitudes.

After the audience hears the carriages depart, there is still suspense when the curtain does not fall.

Finally, as in Act I, we hear sounds in an adjacent room and once again Firs enters. Even in the final soliloquy the audience cannot respond to him unequivocally--we must simultaneously be amused by his remarks and touched by the pathos of his situation. After Firs becomes silent, the curtain still does not fall and instead we hear the sound of the snapping string again. This time there is no one left on stage to explain the strange sound and the audience becomes aware of its own role as viewer and interpreter. This creates a curiously modern sort of suspense--instead of watching the characters' responses, we are paying attention to our own. This is the climax to a process which has been going on throughout the play. The psychological development in The Cherry Orchard does not take place on stage, it takes place in the audience. Each time we are given new insight into a character and are forced to adjust our attitude toward him, we are made aware of the limitations of our previous response. We must evaluate not only what the characters are doing but our own reactions as well.

In the last chapter it was noted that suspense undercuts the humor of Heartbreak House. Suspense in The Cherry Orchard is much more supportive of comedy--we can predict how the characters are going to behave and can foresee that their actions or their passivity will bring no real catastrophe such as occurs at the end of Shaw's play. There are no unexpected reversals in the

play, and surprises merely intensify the predominant mood of each act. Furthermore, the fact that the audience experiences tension concerning its own reactions as well as those of the characters, involves us in a spirit of community with them--in order to justify a more severe judgment on the characters, the audience would have to be challenged more directly as well. This is precisely what occurs in many modern dramas in which both the characters and the audience feel threatened.

In some ways The Cherry Orchard does display the attributes of a modern tragicomedy. The conclusion of the play is known in advance--the cherry orchard will be auctioned--but it is neither desired, as is usually the case in comedy, nor dreaded as it is in tragedy. In addition, we are continually forced to reassess our attitudes toward the action and toward the characters. When sentimentality might take over as in Mme. Ranevsky's first reactions to being home, it is suddenly deflated:

Mme. Ranevsky. God knows, I love my country. I love it dearly. I couldn't look out of the train for crying. (Through tears.)
But, I suppose I'd better have my coffee.
Thank you, Firs, thank you, dear old man.
I'm so glad you're still alive.

Firs. The day before yesterday.

(p. 196)

Firs's unexpected remark makes Lyubov's emotional outburst appear almost ridiculous. On the other hand, when the action approaches the purely comic, a sober touch will be felt. Thus at the opening of Act III, the good humor of the characters and Pishchik's joking suddenly

seem forced when we realize that this is the day of the auction.

In the same manner, the audience is never allowed an unequivocal reaction to any of the characters: when Gayev is about to win sympathy he will suddenly pop a candy into his mouth, making it obvious that his melancholy is largely assumed and that he is as easily satisfied as a child; the delight at Charlotte's ventriloquism suddenly vanishes when she throws her make-believe infant on the floor and announces, "So you will find me another job, won't you? I can't go on like this" (p. 238).

Despite the range of emotions demanded of the spectator by The Cherry Orchard, the play still does not question the comic theme of the power of man. In Bartholomew Fair and Heartbreak House the audience realizes that the characters control their own destinies: they alone are responsible for whatever adversities they encounter and circumstances do not cause their defeat. This is true also in The Cherry Orchard: the estate is sold not because its owners suffer an unexpected reversal of fortune, but because they take no steps to check their profligacy and to retain it. Characters like Lyubov and Gayev are responsible for their situation because they make so little effort to control what befalls them. Taking action is too much trouble and they are content to drift. As Lopakhin demonstrates, characters who act in their own interests, can succeed.

The judgment on the characters is less severe in Chekhov's play than in the earlier works studied because of the audience's ambivalence--it is obvious that Lyubov has mishandled her life, but we have enough sympathy for her that we wonder if, given the circumstances, we would do any better. Seeing the right course of action and taking the necessary steps to follow it, are shown by Chekhov to be very difficult tasks. The Cherry Orchard in this way is pivotal. In Chekhov's play the characters are responsible for their plight not because they are buffoons or nincompoops, as in The Birds, Bartholomew Fair, and Heartbreak House, but because they are ordinary people.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION: THE REASSURANCE OF COMIC SUSPENSE

Waiting for Godot in many ways presents a counter-image to The Birds. In the Greek play, we see two fairly ridiculous old men who, during the course of the drama, are able to completely restructure their universe by their ability to manipulate language. Vladimir and Estragon can be viewed as modern versions of Peisthetaerus and Euelpides. They too are down-at-the-heels exiles or self-exiles, and when we first see them, they, like the Greek protagonists, are at an indeterminate spot on a road, brought there by a mission whose efficacy they are beginning to question. Most important, Vladimir and Estragon have a similar control of language. Estragon reveals that he was once a poet, and in speeches as well as dialogue, both he and his companion demonstrate their skill in using words. This talent does them absolutely no good: Pozzo, unlike the chorus in The Birds, is so concerned with his own speechifying that he pays little attention to what Vladimir and Estragon have to say, and Godot can never be defeated or won over, because he never appears. Neither talent nor knowledge can be of avail in Waiting for Godot. Beckett's play is a tragic-comedy in spite of its funny lines, because it rejects comedy's assertion that man can triumph over circumstances.

Comic suspense is never established in Waiting

for Godot: the audience does not wonder when or how sympathetic characters will overcome obstacles to achieve their objective. Nor is the play instructional, like Bartholomew Fair or Heartbreak House, in showing the failure of the foolish or weak-willed, and thus calling attention to the audience's own superior insight and skill in being able to predict behavior correctly. Instead, the audience gropes for the meaning behind the misadventures of a discomfiting pair of vagrants whose plight is unavoidable. Neither the audience nor the characters enjoy any feeling of prowess.

The characters certainly display no mastery. Even at their most engaging, the protagonists in Beckett's drama are singularly incompetent. As Lionel Abel states of both Waiting for Godot and Endgame,

The characters in these plays . . . are made dramatic, not so much by what they do as by what has already happened to them. They show us the results of dramatic action, but not that action itself. Their drama consists in having been capable of drama at some time, and in their remembrance of that time.¹

For Vladimir and Estragon, the time when they were capable of meaningful action has obviously passed long ago.

In The Birds, the contextual plot emphasized Peisthetaerus's power since he was able to overcome each unforeseen challenge. In Waiting for Godot, the contextual plot underscores Vladimir's and Estragon's failure as we are given repeated demonstrations of their impotence.

¹Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form (New York, 1963), p. 83.

In the first act they are clearly no match for Pozzo who can manipulate his audience's responses and behavior, and Estragon is even mistreated by Lucky. In the second act, when the two tramps try to help Lucky and Pozzo get up, they find themselves on the ground instead. After they all manage to make it to their feet again, the futility of Vladimir's and Estragon's aid is emphasized by the off-stage noise of Lucky's and Pozzo's new collapse. Except for these interludes, most of the protagonists' activity is confined to passing the time as pleasantly as possible. They are unable to accomplish even this: Estragon is bored by Vladimir's story of the two thieves; Vladimir playing at being Lucky finds that he can neither dance nor think; Vladimir's feelings are hurt when they exchange insults; and neither of them has the strength to do their exercises.

Although the characters in Waiting for Godot are incompetent, circumstances cannot be changed anyway, so they are not to blame for their predicament. The world in Beckett's play is no longer indifferent, but actively hostile. Estragon and Vladimir are confronted by enmity from other characters--an unidentified group beats Estragon every night, and Lucky kicks Estragon when he advances to wipe away Lucky's tears. The material world is equally refractory--in the first act, Estragon's boots do not fit and Vladimir's hat is uncomfortable, and at the end of Act II, Estragon's cord breaks when they test if it is

strong enough to bear their weight.² The first words are Estragon's as he attempts to remove his boot, "Nothing to be done" (p. 7),³ and they are repeated twice by Vladimir, once when contemplating his hat, then when musing about their general situation. Pozzo notes that there is no reason why Lucky should be his slave and he the master, "Remark that I might just as well have been in his shoes and he in mine. If chance had not willed otherwise" (p. 21a). Man's condition is not determined by the workings of his will, but by the arbitrary rulings of destiny.

The audience, moreover, is encouraged to share the characters' fatalism. In previous comedy, the impact of the characters' failings was tempered by the audience being able to see ways in which misfortune could have been averted. We knew that Cokes was foolish to tempt the cut-purse by putting his remaining gold in the pocket which has just been picked; we knew that Lyubov and Gayev would be unable to save the orchard from auction unless they engaged in thoughtful planning. In Waiting for Godot, the audience has no insight which Vladimir and Estragon do not also possess. Most important, the audience and the characters share skepticism about Godot's arrival. Estragon consistently doubts that he will come and Vladimir

²For a more thorough discussion of the role of material items in the play, see J. Robert Loy, "Things in Recent French Literature," PMLA, 71 (1956), 27-41.

³Citations are to the Grove Press edition (New York, 1954). Since only the verso pages are numbered, recto pages will be designated by "a."

is only certain that they must await him:

Estragon: He should be here.
 Vladimir: He didn't say for sure he'd come.
 Estragon: And if he doesn't come?
 Vladimir: We'll come back to-morrow.
 Estragon: And then the day after to-morrow.
 Vladimir: Possibly.
 Estragon: And so on.

(pp. 10-10a)

Even if Godot does keep his appointment, the tramps are unsure that he could offer any comfort:

Estragon: What exactly did we ask him for?
 Vladimir: Were you not there?
 Estragon: I can't have been listening.
 Vladimir: Oh. . . Nothing very definite.
 Estragon: A kind of prayer.
 Vladimir: Precisely.
 Estragon: A vague supplication.
 Vladimir: Exactly.
 Estragon: And what did he reply?
 Vladimir: That he'd see.
 Estragon: That he couldn't promise anything.
 Vladimir: That he'd have to think it over.

(p. 13)

If the characters suspect that Godot will not arrive and that his coming would solve little anyway, they are nonetheless persuasive that they should maintain their vigil. Pozzo approves, stating, "Why it's very natural, very natural. I myself in your situation, if I had an appointment with a Godin. . . Godet. . . Godot. . . anyhow you see who I mean, I'd wait till it was black night before I gave up" (p. 24). Vladimir asserts the virtue of their act of waiting, "We have kept our appointment and that's an end to that. We are not saints, but we have kept our appointment. How many people can boast as much?" (p. 51a). Most convincing, perhaps, is the frequency with which the exchange occurs:

Estragon: Let's go.
 Vladimir: We can't
 Estragon: Why not?
 Vladimir: We're waiting for Godot.
 Estragon: Ah!

Through repetition, Vladimir's words, "We're waiting for Godot" acquire a finality which precludes any alternative activity.

The audience must share in the characters' failures because we can see no way for Vladimir and Estragon to escape their plight. We must also question whether we are adequately fulfilling our role as spectators: we are continually being forced to question our expectations for the story and our responses to the characters. In The Cherry Orchard, sentimentality is systematically deflated, but only after it has been allowed to build to an inappropriate height: there is nothing ridiculous about Mme. Ranevsky's initial response to returning home. Whenever the audience starts to become soft-hearted in Waiting for Godot, however, this emotion is immediately squashed by a joke. This occurs, for example, when the two tramps are discussing the Bible,

Vladimir: Do you remember the Gospels?
 Estragon: I remember the maps of the Holy Land. Coloured they were. Very pretty. The Dead Sea was pale blue. The very look of it made me thirsty. That's where we'll go, I used to say, that's where we'll go for our honeymoon. We'll swim. We'll be happy.
 Vladimir: You should have been a poet.
 Estragon: I was. (Gesture towards his rags.) Isn't that obvious?

(pp. 8a-9)

Even the desperation of the suicide attempt at the end of

the play is undercut by the jokes about Estragon's pants falling off.

The opposite reaction is also elicited; just as the audience is settling back to enjoy a farce, we suddenly feel embarrassed for laughing. When Estragon finally decides to abandon his boots, for example, he becomes unexpectedly philosophical,

Vladimir: But you can't go barefoot!

Estragon: Christ did.

Vladimir: Christ! What has Christ got to do with it? You're not going to compare yourself to Christ!

Estragon: All my life I've compared myself to him.

Vladimir: But where he lived it was warm! It was dry!

Estragon: Yes. And they crucified quick.

(p. 34a)

Sometimes the audience must adjust its attitude several times in the same speech. Pozzo's carefully prepared oration starts comically, but then his absurdity becomes mixed with a certain eloquence that prevents laughter,

Pozzo: Look! (All look at the sky except Lucky who is dozing off again. Pozzo jerks the rope.) Will you look at the sky, pig! (Lucky looks at the sky.) Good that's enough. (They stop looking at the sky.) What is there so extraordinary about it? Qua sky. It is pale and luminous like any sky at this hour of the day. (Pause.) In these latitudes. (Pause.) When the weather is fine. (Lyrical.) An hour ago (he looks at his watch, prosaic) roughly (lyrical) after having poured forth ever since (he hesitates, prosaic) say ten o'clock in the morning (lyrical) tirelessly torrents of red and white light it begins to lose its effulgence, to grow pale. . . . but behind this veil of gentleness and peace night is charging (vibrantly) and will burst upon us (snaps his fingers) pop! like that! (his inspiration leaves him) just

when we least expect it. (Silence. Gloomily.)
 That's how it is on this bitch of an earth.
 (pp. 25-25a)

Both lyricism and humor are evanescent in Waiting for Godot.

This frequent re-examination of how we are to interpret the dialogue is symptomatic of a more basic uncertainty about our response to the characters. Estragon and Vladimir partake of the personalities of both vaudeville comedians and tragic sufferers. The audience can initially laugh at the indignity of their discomforts, until we are taken aback when reminded that the pain is genuine. In like manner, Estragon's loss of memory concerning the previous day's events is funny until he unexpectedly explodes at Vladimir's question if he recognizes the place, "Recognize! What is there to recognize? All my lousy life I've crawled about in the mud! And you talk to me about scenery!" (p. 30a). In spite of his ludicrous situation, the audience is forced to become aware of the reality of Estragon's mental anguish.

At the same time, we are not allowed maudlin concern for the two tramps either. Frederick Hoffman has pointed out how Beckett favors the pratfall, which he defines as "any disgusting or vulgar defeat or collapse of sentimental expectations."⁴ Sometimes the characters themselves experience the sudden frustration of tender

⁴Samuel Beckett: The Language of Self (Carbondale, Ill., 1962), p. 142.

emotion, as in Act I when Estragon finally persuades Vladimir to embrace him, only to find himself repelled by Vladimir's stench of garlic. More often, however, the sentimentality and consequent disappointment are only felt by the audience. In spite of our hopes for brotherly affection from the tramps, they repeatedly engage in sudden bursts of cruelty--Vladimir won't listen to his companion's dream; Estragon becomes furious when Vladimir asks him about their location; they both enjoy the exchange of insults; and Estragon is pleased to attack the prostrate Lucky. Perhaps the strongest statement of alienation occurs in the second act when Estragon is overcome by despair,

Estragon: God have pity on me!

Vladimir: (vexed). And me?

Estragon: On me! Pity! On me!

(p. 49a)

Although the friendship between Vladimir and Estragon apparently survives through the drama, it is never the whole-hearted commitment we desire, and it repeatedly breaks down into rancor under the strain of their self-concern.

All the standard methods of evoking comic suspense are thus rendered impossible in Waiting for Godot. There is no foreseen conclusion that we are looking forward to being attained, we do not wonder when the characters will gain our insight, nor when interrupted action will be completed. The characters know all that the audience does about their present situation, and more than they

are willing to share about their previous history. Their incompetence and the hostility of their environment ensure that no significant activity is possible. As Alfonso Sastre observes, however,

This is precisely the fascinating thing about Waiting for Godot: nothing happens. It is in this sense a lucid testimony of nothingness. And it cannot be denied that while many dramas of intrigue in which a great deal happens leave us cold, this 'nothing happening' of Godot keeps us in suspense.⁵

Like Vladimir and Estragon, the audience too is waiting: waiting to understand the significance of what is happening on stage, and waiting for the play to end.

Richard Schechner, writing of the function of time in the play, notes that Vladimir says of the second Pozzo-Lucky visit, "That passed the time." He comments, "For them, perhaps; but for the audience? It is an ironic scene--the entire cast sprawled on the floor, hard to see, not much action. It makes an audience aware that time is not passing fast enough."⁶ This is true throughout the play. Although Vladimir and Estragon derive small pleasure from their pastimes, these are even less satisfying for the audience. There is nothing amusing about the exchange of insults, or the parody of Lucky and Pozzo. Time passes even more slowly for the audience than for the

⁵"Seven Notes on Waiting for Godot," originally "Siete Notas sobre Esperando a Godot," Primer Acto, 1 (1957); rpt. in A Casebook on Waiting for Godot, ed. Ruby Cohn (New York, 1967), p. 106.

⁶"There's Lots of Time in Godot," MD, 9 (1956), p. 273.

characters. This generates a certain kind of suspense. Hugh Kenner has pointed out, "Everyone knows that this is the Play about Waiting for the Man who Doesn't Come,"⁷ but we often choose to disregard this knowledge. In The Cherry Orchard, the audience feels suspense about the sale of the estate even though we know that it cannot be saved, because we have enough sympathy for Lyubov that we hope that she can be spared disappointment. In Waiting for Godot, the title informs us that if Godot arrives the play must end, and we are discomforted enough by the inactivity that like bored schoolchildren awaiting the recess bell, the audience hopes that just this once he will come and we will be released early.

Schechner's remark also hints at what is the major difference between the protagonists' and the spectators' awarenesses--we do not have keener insight nor greater information than the characters, but we are more disturbed than they by the inactivity. Vladimir and Estragon are content to wait without searching for the reason for doing so, but the audience feels compelled to discover a significance for their stay. Various hints in the play encourage this quest for philosophical meaning. Vladimir speaks of the two thieves crucified with Christ, one of whom was saved, the other damned; Estragon compares himself with Christ; Lucky's babble has something to do

⁷A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett (New York, 1973), p. 29.

with the proof of a deity and his supposed benevolence; and Godot is in some ways equated with God. This last is most apparent when the messenger appears at the end of the second act,

Vladimir: (softly). Has he a beard, Mr. Godot?

Boy: Yes Sir.

Vladimir: Fair or. . . (he hesitates). . . or black?

Boy: I think it's white, Sir.

Silence.

Vladimir: Christ have mercy on us!

(p. 59)

We do not usually look for theological speculations in comedy, but Waiting for Godot appears to engage periodically in just such activity.

Suspense in Waiting for Godot thus diverges from that in traditional comedy, in being based upon the audience's not knowing. As long as the audience is in doubt about the philosophical message, the play succeeds. If the spectator thinks he knows the meaning or suspects that the play does not have one, he is usually disappointed or outraged. This is apparent in the original reviews of the play. Wolcott Gibbs, writing in the New Yorker, lamented,

I have struggled to extract some other and less sophomoric message from Mr. Beckett's play . . . but I'm afraid that this 1934 Model of the Universal Allegory is the best I can do. All I can say, in a critical sense, is that I have seldom seen such ⁸ mediocre moonshine stated with such inordinate fuss.

Brooks Atkinson, on the other hand, opened his favorable review with the warning, "Don't expect this column to

⁸"Enough Is Enough Is Enough," 5 May 1956, p. 84.

explain Samuel Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot,' which was acted at the John Golden last evening. It is a mystery wrapped in an enigma."⁹ The play's impact resides in this uncertainty--the spectators are still not confident as they leave the theater that they have responded correctly to the characters or have grasped the meaning behind the plot. Comedy reassures the audience of man's importance; Waiting for Godot succeeds if we are troubled by the view of the world that is presented, and by our own reactions to it.

Waiting for Godot is properly labelled a tragic-comedy, then, because comic suspense is never established and the comic theme of man's power over events is repudiated. The characters display no mastery and the audience feels none because we have no superior knowledge or insight to exempt us from the errors of the characters. Furthermore, the foreseen conclusion is unavoidable not because of any comic myopia, but because man's will is no match for circumstances. The action is saved from being tragic merely because the characters do not often try to assert this will.

From this discussion of a tragicomedy, conclusions about the role of suspense in dramatic comedy may be easier to draw. Generally suspense underscores the power of personality because, despite surprising detours in the plot, the audience's anticipations and desires are fulfilled.

⁹The New York Times, 20 April 1956, p. 21.

In linear plots, the audience can guess how the action will finally be resolved, and events during the course of the drama can be foreseen because of the audience's knowledge or insight. Characters are able to formulate projects and to carry them out, and suspense focuses attention on when and how the plans will be completed. We wonder when the Sexton will make his disclosure to Leonato, how Autolycus will beguile the shepherd's son, or how Volpone will be able to see Celia without being detected by her husband. Suspense can also concern when or how understanding will be achieved--how will Beatrice and Benedick mature, when will Raina realize her love for Bluntschli? Plays such as Much Ado About Nothing and Arms and the Man assert the power both of the characters and of the audience. In the first work, the characters are consistently able to act upon their desires and accomplish their objectives. In Shaw's play, too, the characters can do as they please as soon as they become aware of what this really is. In both cases, the fact that the audience can correctly predict events and reactions supports the view that the universe is essentially subject to human will.

All's Well That Ends Well demonstrates how pleasure evaporates when comic suspense is not established. Such serious doubts are raised about the protagonists that the audience derives small satisfaction from their final reconciliation, and in the last act our expectations are so often frustrated that we wonder about the playwright's

control over his plot and our own response to his work. Volpone shuns the conventional "happy ending," but the audience is given information and insight so that we do not share in the characters' defeat. Although Volpone and Mosca fail in their grandiose schemes, and the gulls are punished for their folly, the audience can leave the theater with a sense of well-being: our judgments have been confirmed, our anticipations fulfilled.

The contextual plot postulates a different world order in which causal relationships do not hold. Chance assumes a greater role in these plays than in linear drama where there is a governing impetus to the action. The arbitrary nature of events is frequently typified by a figure within the play. In The Birds the moronic Triballian casts the deciding vote among the gods, and in similar fashion Trouble-All determines who will marry Grace by marking one of the two names on the basis of his momentary whim. The burglar in Heartbreak House and the beggar in The Cherry Orchard play no such decisive functions, but they do represent arbitrary Fortune in capriciously interrupting the action. Finally in Waiting for Godot, this role is played by Godot himself who may or may not come, and who favors the boy who tends the goats while mistreating his brother, the shepherd.

Since events occur by chance, there can be no governing plans and both the audience and the characters are more often surprised by what happens than in the

linear plot. Furthermore whatever does occur by coincidence in linear comedy often proves lucky and aids the characters--the watch happens to overhear Borachio and Conrade, Helena arrives in Florence at the same time as Bertram, and Perdita is found by the shepherd. Chance, on the other hand, is never productive in the contextual plot.¹⁰ If the play ends happily, it is because the characters have been able to wrest this happiness out themselves.

Contextual plots actually offer the opportunity for a bolder display of human power. Since the audience cannot always foresee what will occur during the drama, our ability to predict how characters will behave and the outcome of individual episodes is more rewarding. Similarly, because the characters must combat unexpected events, their success, when achieved, is more impressive. The Birds asserts the power both of the audience and the protagonist. Although constantly beleaguered, Peisthetaerus never loses his power to overcome each new challenge. His triumphs are shared by the audience--once Peisthetaerus has persuaded the chorus, we are able to predict his successes with ever greater confidence.

Significantly, since The Birds, contextual plots have advanced the theme of man's power with increasing

¹⁰This point is made of Chekhov's plays by Robert L. Jackson in "Chekhov's Seagull," in his Chekhov: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1967), p. 105.

hesitancy. In Bartholomew Fair, Quarlous is the only one who has Peisthetaerus's ability to consistently manipulate affairs to his advantage, and his triumph of gaining Dame Purecraft is undermined by the recollection of his speech in the first act on the horrors of marrying an old woman. The characters in Heartbreak House do not even attempt to assert their power--they all allow themselves to be governed by events and the only success achieved is that of temporary survival. In both Bartholomew Fair and Heartbreak House, suspense still confirms the power of the audience. We can look down upon the characters with good-natured scorn because of their obvious failings: we know that we would not be as foolish as the visitors to the fair, nor as complacent as the inhabitants of Heartbreak House, and trust that we can avoid their fate. The fact that the audience can foresee what the characters cannot, offers the assurance that misfortune could have been averted.

The Cherry Orchard also lacks any equivalent to Peisthetaerus and we realize that the characters are responsible for whatever unhappiness they may experience because they could act to prevent it. A new uneasiness is felt in Chekhov's play because of the audience's attitude toward the characters--although we can foresee consequences of Lyubov's and Gayev's conduct that they choose to ignore, we must wonder if, in their situation, we would have any greater insight. The audience's power is also

called into question by the frequent changes of mood in the play which must make the spectators question their previous responses. In Waiting for Godot we have moved to tragicomedy as neither the characters nor the audience experiences any sense of mastery. Vladimir and Estragon are at the mercy of circumstance and are the slaves of material things. The audience can foresee no change in the characters' condition and is discomforted in its own role as interpreter.

Comedy's theme of the power of man depends, therefore, on the audience's foreknowledge and suspense. Either the audience shares the protagonists' confidence in their ability to overcome all obstacles, or if the play ends with the characters' failure, then the audience must be able to foresee this as well and be able to envisage ways in which it could have been avoided. The path to the conclusion may become obscure during the course of the play, but the anticipated ending will eventually be achieved and our expectations justified. For the audience at least, events are predictable and therefore controllable. One of the greatest pleasures comedy offers is this picture of the world as subject to the imprint of human hopes and expectations.

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APPENDIX

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS OF PERIODICALS

<u>Am J Philol</u>	<u>American Journal of Philology</u>
<u>AR</u>	<u>Antioch Review</u>
<u>BNYPL</u>	<u>Bulletin of the New York Public Library</u>
<u>ClassR</u>	<u>Classical Review</u>
<u>CLS</u>	<u>Comparative Literary Survey</u>
<u>CR</u>	<u>Critical Review</u>
<u>CritQ</u>	<u>Critical Quarterly</u>
<u>DramS</u>	<u>Drama Survey</u>
<u>EA</u>	<u>Etudes Anglaises</u>
<u>EIC</u>	<u>Essays in Criticism</u>
<u>ELR</u>	<u>English Literary Renaissance</u>
<u>EM</u>	<u>English Miscellany</u>
<u>ETJ</u>	<u>Educational Theater Journal</u>
<u>HLQ</u>	<u>Huntington Library Quarterly</u>
<u>HudR</u>	<u>Hudson Review</u>
<u>JAAC</u>	<u>Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism</u>
<u>JEGP</u>	<u>Journal of English and German Philology</u>
<u>JGE</u>	<u>Journal of General Education</u>
<u>MD</u>	<u>Modern Drama</u>
<u>MLQ</u>	<u>Modern Language Quarterly</u>
<u>MLR</u>	<u>Modern Language Review</u>
<u>MP</u>	<u>Modern Philology</u>
<u>NLH</u>	<u>New Literary History</u>

<u>NZSJ</u>	<u>New Zealand Slavonic Journal</u>
<u>PCP</u>	<u>Pacific Coast Philology</u>
<u>PQ</u>	<u>Philological Quarterly</u>
<u>QuarJour of Speech</u>	<u>Quarterly Journal of Speech</u>
<u>REL</u>	<u>Review of English Literature</u>
<u>RenD</u>	<u>Renaissance Drama</u>
<u>RES</u>	<u>Review of English Studies</u>
<u>SCN</u>	<u>Seventeenth Century Notes</u>
<u>SEER</u>	<u>Slavonic and East European Review</u>
<u>SEL</u>	<u>Studies in English Literature</u>
<u>ShawR</u>	<u>Shaw Review</u>
<u>ShS</u>	<u>Shakespeare Survey</u>
<u>SP</u>	<u>Studies in Philology</u>
<u>SQ</u>	<u>Shakespeare Quarterly</u>
<u>SR</u>	<u>Sewanee Review</u>
<u>TDR</u>	<u>Tulane Drama Review</u>
<u>TSLL</u>	<u>Texas Studies in Language and Literature</u>
<u>UTQ</u>	<u>University of Toronto Quarterly</u>
<u>VQR</u>	<u>Virginia Quarterly Review</u>
<u>WascanaR</u>	<u>Wascana Review</u>
<u>WHR</u>	<u>Western Humanities Review</u>
<u>YES</u>	<u>Yearbook of English Studies</u>
<u>YFS</u>	<u>Yale French Studies</u>
<u>YR</u>	<u>Yale Review</u>